THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF FAITH & DISABILITY

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Abstract

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As a culturally responsive educator of the Christian faith, I have held various Christian education positions within the church. As a curriculum writer for faith development for Christian youth workshops, I observed youth leaders engaging in lessons, activities, and sermons without considering students with different learning abilities. This research project will look at how the church provides support for the education and inclusion—spiritual and otherwise—of people with different physical and cognitive abilities.

To all of the marginalized students and families who allowed me to get into
good trouble, necessary trouble
on their behalf.

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CHAPTER 1
THE SETTING

Geographic Location

At the Bible Teachers' College located in the suburbs of Montclair, New Jersey, Dr. Wilbert Webster White developed a unique curriculum stressing the study of the Bible as the centerpiece of instruction for its thirty-two students. His mission was to equip these scholars, a large percentage being women, with practical training in ministry in order to become Bible teachers or missionaries, or to obtain positions with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Understanding the need for this type of curriculum to reach a wide spectrum of believers, White moved the school, (now renamed the Bible Teachers' Training School in order to meet to New York State educational criteria), from the suburbs of New Jersey to New York City in 1902. In 1921, White renamed the non-denominational institution The Biblical Seminary in New York (BSNY) and moved it into four houses in downtown Manhattan. In 1927, BSNY opened the doors to its new building on East 49th Street.

In 1966, the institution underwent another name change and was now referred to as New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). Initially hired as the Chief Development Officer, the later seminary president Dr. George W. "Bill" Webber relocated NYTS to midtown Manhattan in 1970, in order to better respond to the cultural and spiritual needs of the influx of immigrants entering the city. Following in White's footsteps, Webber developed theological programs to also include Spanish- and Korean-speaking urban church leaders. Over time, Webber began to believe the city was indeed its campus. So,

in 1982, Webber sold the seminary's property on 49th Street and, in 2002, NYTS moved into the Interchurch Center in Morningside Heights, at 475 Riverside Drive and 120th Street in New York where it continues its weekly scheduled classes at the nearby historic Riverside Church.[1]

Setting & Demographics

> The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada is a membership organization of more than 270 graduate schools that conduct post baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. The Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada accredits the schools and approves the degree programs they offer.[2]

According to The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), there are seven accredited theological institutions within fifty miles of New York Theological Seminary, which sits demographically in the neighborhood of Morningside Heights or what natives of the area call the Upper West Side of New York City.

In a neighborhood surrounded by approximately 400 places of worship and several academic institutions, such as Columbia University, Bank Street College, Manhattan School of Music, Jewish Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary, New York Theological Seminary is located in The Interchurch Center on the fifth floor of a nineteen-story limestone-clad office building. The seminary's suite holds administrative offices and three conference rooms and student workstations. Although

[1] The Burke Library Archives Columbia University Libraries at Union Theological Seminary, New York, "Finding Aids," https://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/misc/ldpd_11693337.pdf (accessed August 16, 2020).

[2] Association of Theological Schools, https://www.ats.edu/ (accessed August 16, 2020).

some classes can be held in the one of the three conference rooms, the majority of the classes are held in the Martin Luther King Jr. Wing of the newly renovated historic Riverside Church.

Monday thru Friday between the hours of 6:00 PM to 9:30 PM and two to five hour sessions on most Saturdays, NYTS Seminarians attend various classes between the third and fourth floors. Approximately 317 NYTS students engage in theological discussions with a clear view of the Upper West Side. Nestled among other religious and educational institutions such as Union Theological Seminary and Jewish Theological Seminary, NYTS students sit in newly renovated high ceiling classrooms at black and grey matching mobile tables and chairs with 48-inch flat screen high definition televisions and white boards that are framed by six limestone arched pane glass windows. As intended by its founder Dr. White, 176 women and 141 men make up the diverse group of ministry leaders (185 Black, 48 Latinx, 30 Asian, and 24 White,) who represent the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of its learning community.[3] Continuing to sow the seeds of White's mission and vision, the institution has gained distinctive attributes for its emphasis on ministry and mission with an urban focus on inclusivity for both women and men of diverse cultural and religious traditions.

Offering its programs at nights and weekends to church leaders who were either working full-time, already in ministry, bi-vocational, or contemplating a shift from a secular to a religious vocation, there was a seat at the table for all those "rightly explaining the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15 NRSV). For several years the institution

[3] College Tuition Compare, "Student Population at New York Theological Seminary (NYTS)," http://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/edu/193894/new-york-theological-seminary/enrollment/#race-block (accessed August 16, 2020).

focused on the Master of Sacred Theology (STM) degree and not the Master of Divinity (MDiv). Finally, in the mid-1970s, the seminary added the Master of Professional Studies (MPS) and the Doctorate of Ministry programs. Still, it wasn't until the early 1980s that the institution began to offer the MDiv degree and extended its student body to the incarcerated men at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. Here qualified inmates enrolled in the program to develop leadership skills, which helped them provide pastoral care upon their release. As a social commitment to justice, this program upholds White's increasingly multiculturally inclusive message.[4]

Focus Group

On any given day of the week in New York City, Baptists, Black Muslims, Episcopalians, Jews, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and other various faith communities gather together to participate in practices of faith and worship. Although some of the faith leaders have been trained in accredited theological academic institutions, others have not. Research professors of Special Education Naomi H. Annandale and Erick W. Carter write,

> Theological schools provide the primary training ground within which future clergy receive their preparation for leadership and service within congregations across North America. Theological education seeks to engage students in a process of formation that incorporates ever-deepening and complexifying engagement and reflection upon ancient texts and rituals, historically developed understandings, and contemporaneous life experiences and challenges for persons and communities. Students are called to learn a new way of seeing and responding to a world searching for meaning, justice, and human flourishing.[5]

[4] The Burke Library Archives, "Finding Aids."

[5] Naomi H. Annandale and Erik Carter, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study," *Theological Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 84, http://faithanddisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2014-Annandale-Carter-TE.pdf (accessed August 16, 2020).

Yet, presence and participation within these communities of faith are anything but equitable and just for people with different abilities. Often these individuals and their families are excluded from attending weekly worship services based on the physical design of the building or the negative connotation associated with people with different abilities who are looking for places in which to engage in their faith practices while seeking comfort in a welcoming community.

Like many public institutions that pay little to no attention to people with different abilities, seminaries have also missed this important theological perspective. In fact, in 2008,

> ATS issued guidelines for its member schools "to live toward a vision of inclusion of all God's people in theological education" and challenged those institutions to "welcome people with disabilities into the communal life and mission of the institution" and "prepare women and men for ministry with attention to the unique gifts and needs of people with different abilities who will be present in their congregations and communities."[6]

According to ATS, "calls have been issued for greater inclusivity for people with different abilities —in enrollment, in curriculum, and in faculty"[7] for more than thirty years. To date, there are only two theological seminaries in the United States that have demonstrated a commitment to this theological perspective by creating a certificate program and NYTS is not one of them.

[6] Ibid., 85.

[7] Ibid.

The Problem

According to Annandale and Carter, theological school curricula across the United States have neglected the theological perspective of liberation theology regarding people with different abilities.

> In 2001, Robert Anderson and W. Daniel Blair surveyed ATS member schools and found little representation of disability concerns (via curricula or by accommodation for students with disabilities) in North American theological education. Anderson used these data to argue for what he called "infusing" graduate theological education with disability. Similarly, between 1999–2000, Laura-Jean Gilbert studied fourteen United Church of Christ seminaries, using a combination of interviews (faculty, students, administrators, alumni), a survey, document analysis, and site visits to learn about acceptance and accommodation of students with disabilities. She found that seminaries were making progress regarding physical accessibility, but that little was being accomplished in terms of curriculum, even while schools typically had courses on women, gender roles, and sexualities. Additional studies are needed to describe the current landscape of theological education in relation to disability.[8]

The Spiritual Impact

On December 1, 2019, China reported its first case of a severe acute reparatory syndrome called COVID-19. By January 21, 2020, the Chinese government announced that a cluster of infections was traced to a market place in Wuhan, which identified 306 cases and six deaths. By then, six countries, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and United States announced their first cases. On January 15, a thirty-year old man traveled from Wuhan back to his home in Snohomish County, Washington and began to develop symptoms resembling the COVID virus. By the time the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID Virus a public health emergency on

[8] Ibid.

January 30, the United States confirmed six cases but President Donald J. Trump did not declare it a national emergency until March 13.[9]

By mid-March, state and local officials began the prohibitions and cancellations of large-scale gatherings such as concerts, sporting events, and Broadway shows. Soon after, stay-at-home orders and the closure of schools[10] and churches followed.[11] Unlike other communities in the state of New York, New York City began to report infections and deaths at a higher rate. The New York City Health Department reported 5,465 cases, 1,595 hospitalizations and 448 deaths by April 1.[12] Most cluster infections and death occurred in nursing homes, long-term care and correction facilities, and group homes for the intellectually disabled.[13] To date, churches have been conducting virtual worship weekly services and Bible services in place of congregational gatherings. For the past five months, church leaders have had to reimage the way in which they deliver sermons, while people with different abilities had to focus on securing their access to the faith community.

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[9] Think Global Health, https://www.thinkglobalhealth.org/article/updated-timeline-coronavirus (access August 16, 2020).

[10] Cory Turner, "Half of U.S. Public School Students Are Home for the School Year," npr.org, April 16, 2020, https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/16/835941050/nearly-half-of-u-s-public-school-students-are-home-for-the-school-year (accessed August 16, 2020).

[11] Andrew M. Cuomo, "Executive Order No. 202.6: Continuing Temporary Suspension and Modification of Laws Relating to the Disaster Emergency," https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/no-2026-continuing-temporary-suspension-and-modification-laws-relating-disaster-emergency (access August 16, 2020).

[12] New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page (access August 16, 2020).

[13] Joseph Shapiro, "COVID-19 Infections and Deaths Are Higher among Those with Intellectual Disabilities," https://www.npr.org/2020/06/09/872401607/covid-19-infections-and-deaths-are-higher-among-those-with-intellectual-disabilities (accessed January 31, 2021).

CHAPTER 2
THE CHALLENGE

Throughout chapters 1-3 in the book of Genesis, we learn how God created the heavens and earth and deemed that it was good. Yet, when it came to creating humankind, God chose to create us in his own image. Translated from the Hebrew word *tselem*—image means likenesses or phantom.[14] So, unlike any of the other *creatures* created by God, it was his intension to create humankind in such a unique way that it set us apart from his other creations. Here one might suggest that we were created not to be an exact replica but more than the average "good." Theologian Anthony Hoekema writes, "The concept of man as the image or likeness of God tells us that man—as he was created—was to mirror God and to represent God,"[15] in his spirituality and moral integrity. Yet, throughout the Bible, we learn of various characters that are in need of some type of healing from a disease, and or mental or physical disability. How could this be if were made in the image of God?

When we study the word *blindness* in biblical literature we can identify six scriptures that use this word in its text. However, when we exegete the text we must look closely at the social content and context in which the word is being used. In the Old Testament scriptures, we can determine that the word *blindness* is used as a physical

[14] Strong's Concordance, s.v. "tselem," https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6754.htm (accessed February 25, 2016).

[15] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 66-67.

affliction or a curse placed on someone by God. In this context, *blindness* simply means to physically have less than 1/10 of normal eye vision.[16] Genesis 19:11; Deuteronomy 28:28; 2 Kings 6:18 and Zechariah 12:4 all consist of the same terminology to either "*strike,*" "*smite*" or "*afflict*" with "*blindness*" suggesting that this type of *blindness* is of the physical nature. Blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis are terms used to describe most of the common forms of physical disability in antiquity. Historically, these terms were intertwined with Bible stories where the main characters were either born with or afflicted with a curse placed on them by God as a result of a sin directly committed by the person or that of their parents (John 9:24). Therefore, when we read the Bible from a high Christology, we may miss the liberating theology that may be intertwined within the text. So, if one reads the Bible from a low Christology, one might discover that there are a few important biblical figures that have been described or strongly suggested to having some type of physical, developmental, or cognitive disabilities that were used to fulfill God's promises.

For instance, after wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:3-4), Jacob walked with a limp because the angel "struck him on the hip socket" since he had "striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." This transformative moment *marked* Jacob as the *chosen one*. From there, his name was changed and Jacob was now called Israel and would become the father of the Twelve Tribes of Judah (Genesis 32:22-32). According to the book of Exodus (4:10), Moses stood before God and self-proclaimed, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Here the ancient Midrash

[16] American Foundation for the Blind, https://www.afb.org (accessed October 9, 2019).

Commentary Shemot Rabbah suggests that when Moses was a child, the Pharaoh coddled him so much that Moses could be seen taking off the Pharaoh's crown and putting it in his mouth and on his own head. This playful act did not sit right with Pharaoh's magicians and they saw it as disrespectful and a sign that Moses would eventually grow up to take over the thrown. For this, they believed that Moses should be killed. However, Moses's future father-in-law Jethro intercedes and advises that Moses' innocent playful act is indeed no threat to the throne. He suggests that a piece of gold and a piece of hot coal be placed in front of Moses to see if he truly has any understanding of his own behavior. If he does, implies Jethro, then he should be put to death. When the two objects are place in front of Moses, Moses instantly reaches for the gold. Here, I suggest that Moses reaches for the gold because it was a shiny object and may have resembled parts of the crown. Moreover, the Midrash states, the angel Gabriel instantly intervenes and swipes the gold out of the way leaving only the coal for Moses to pick up which he automatically puts into his mouth. Therefore, according to this account, from that moment, Moses speech has "never been eloquent, neither in the *past* nor even now" but God chooses Moses anyway to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.[17] Furthermore, when we read the story of Esau and Jacob, one may suggest the possibility of both Esau and Isaac dealing with some type of cognitive disability. I mean, who trades their birthright for a bowl of soup—A bowl of soup?

The theological perspective on people with different abilities is deeply rooted in three Christian theological themes, which have created social and spiritual barriers for

[17] Michael Graves, "Scholar and Advocate: The Stories of Moses in Midrash 'Exodus Rabbah,'" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 1 (2011), http://www.jstor.org/stable/26424411.

people with different abilities. The first is embedded in the idea that someone with a disability is the result of some kind of sinful punishment. This type of exclusion isolates and often hinders the identified disabled person from any type of divine leadership role in the faith community. Secondly, the disabled are implicitly seen as those who virtuously endure physical or intellectual suffering to teach and encourage "passive acceptance of social barriers for the sake for obedience to God." The third theme suggests, people with different abilities are to be perceived, as charity cases and their inability to do things are to remind the able to exercise and practice a level of humility that is just.[18]

Since theology is the study of God and his relationship to the world, liberation for the oppressed can easily be accessed through the teachings of Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., James Cone, and Nancy Eiesland. These theologians suggest we use the theology of liberation to aid the voices of the oppressed that are often excluded from the conversations for justice. Cone posits that since God historically sides with the oppressed as he did with the Israelites and sought out their liberation, then blackness must be equated to the oppression of the disinherited and the marginalized. So, I suggest, like blackness, the disabled must also be equated to the oppression of the disinherited and the marginalized since they too experience daily discriminatory acts. Furthermore, Luke 24:36-39 tells us that after Jesus had ascended to Heaven and returned to eat with his disciples, he identified himself by showing the holes in is feet, hands, and pierced side. Here, I propose, since Jesus had already ascended to Heaven then he should have been "made whole." Yet, he appeared before his disciples as a disabled God. Although some

[18] Pauline A. Otieno, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability: Implications on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Kenya," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no.4 (2009), http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/988/1164 (accessed October 9, 2019).

may suggest that he needed to appear as he was to prove his identity, I believe that in order for God to be the God of the Oppressed, he needed to experience everything that one could possibly experience and to clarify that being disabled is not a divine punishment of sin. As a result, this theological perspective broadens the lens of a liberation theology to include a liberation theology of disability.

CHAPTER 3
DISABILITY AND ITS PLACE IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

In order to begin looking at theology through the lens of disability, we must ask ourselves one simple question: To what extent is disability addressed within the theological education curriculum?

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, I will be using the research of scholars Naomi H. Annandale and Erick W. Carter of Vanderbilt University who conducted a study in 2014 to examine the ways in which disability is addressed and experienced in theological institutions in North America. The results of the study were published in *Theological Education* entitled, "Disability and Theological Education: A North American Study." I will use this study in the absence of my own to emphasize and address the limited preparation and exposure seminary students receive in order to effectively and unbiasedly address disabilities in ministry.

Annandale and Carter selected "118 academic deans, deans of student life, faculty, and other administrators from theological institutions accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting. … Most respondents had served in their current roles for an average of 5.6 years (SD = 6.1)."[19]

> 41.5 percent identified themselves solely as academic administrators, 4.2 percent solely as faculty, and 47.5 percent as both faculty and academic administrators; 6.8 percent reported other roles (e.g., director of student services). The majority (76.1%) indicated they were highly involved with setting curriculum. … In their leadership roles, participants reported strong knowledge of the ministry preparation curriculum at their schools:

[19] Annandale and Carter, "Disability and Theological Education," 86.

> 81.2 percent described their knowledge as very broad. … Among these leaders, 26.7 percent reported having specialization in the area of biblical studies, 26.7 percent in pastoral or practical theology, 23.3 percent in theology, 8.6 percent in historical studies, and/or 14.7 percent in other areas (e.g., bioethics, higher education administration, philosophy).[20]

82.2% of the respondents "represented theological schools from a particular denominational or theological tradition" and "thirty-nine different traditions were represented." Specifically, "18.0 percent had enrollments of less than 100, 50.0 percent between 100 and 250, 20.3 percent between 251 and 500, and 10.2 percent more than 500; enrollment was not provided for two schools."[21]

> When asked about whether participants identified as having a disability and, if so, how this had impacted their thinking and practices related to theological education. Twelve (10.6%) leaders said they had a disability, 101 (89.4%) said they did not have a disability, and six did not answer the question. Half of those with disabilities said it influenced their thinking about disabilities and theological education quite a bit, four said it influenced them somewhat, two said it influenced them a little bit, and one said not at all. Four indicated that having a disability impacted their practices as leaders at their institutions quite a bit, five said somewhat, and four said a little bit. Participants were asked about their personal experience with persons with disabilities and prior training. More than two thirds (69.8%) of participants reported having extensive personal experience with persons with disabilities and more than half (53.4%) of participants reported having some training related to working with persons with disabilities by way of conferences and workshops (70.9%), practica or fieldwork (50.0%), their own research (45.2%), course work (35.5%), and some other avenue (17.7%; e.g., online tutorial, colleagues).[22]

When Annandale and Carter invited respondents to complete a survey addressing the intersection of disabilities, theological education and ministry, they focused on six questions but for this paper we will focus on the top three questions.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

> (1) Where and how disability was addressed in the curriculum, (2) potential challenges to addressing disabilities within theological education, (3) the preparation of students related to including people with disabilities in future ministries.[23]

First respondents were to rate the extent to which disabilities were addressed in each of six potential areas of the school's curriculum: biblical studies, theology, historical studies, pastoral care/pastoral theology/ congregational care, religious education, and spiritual formation. Then they were asked two additional questions to gauge students' access to disability-related information: "Does your library offer resources related to disabilities and/or disabilities and religion? In the past three years, has your school offered any courses specifically focused on disabilities?" and asked respondents to list the titles of those courses.

> To determine the extent to which issues related to disability might be addressed outside of course work in the past three academic years, we asked whether their schools have offered any (1) internships specifically focused on disabilities, (2) fieldwork specifically focused on disabilities, (3) lectures (outside of particular classes) specifically focused on disabilities, (4) service/ outreach specifically focused on disabilities, (5) student groups specifically focused on disabilities, and (6) student publications specifically focused on disabilities.[24]

Challenges. To gather information on why the topic of disability might not be addressed explicitly within theological education, Annandale and Carter asked participants to rate the extent to which they agreed with each of the seven potential reasons for this omission (e.g., "Other issues are more important." "We don't have any faculty with interest or expertise in this area"). Table 3 (see Appendix G) shows the responses for each statement received using a five-point, Likert-type scale (i.e., strongly

[23] Ibid., 87.

[24] Ibid.

disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree). In my own research, I too found church leaders expressing similar potential reasons for why this theological concept was not the most important issue that the church was facing right now.

Ministry preparation. Annandale and Carter explored how prepared graduates were when implementing initiatives to integrate people with different abilities in the full life and fellowship of a congregation in five specific areas: worship and ritual, leadership roles, fellowship, religious education, and service. Responses were provided on a four-point, Likert-type scale (i.e., not at all prepared, a little prepared, adequately prepared, highly prepared). In addition, participants were also questioned on how well prepared their graduates were in "responding to spiritual and theological questions resulting from human experiences such as a loved one's disablement, the birth of a child with a disability, or the potential challenges of living with their own disability"[25] using the same four-point scale.

Resource needs. To get an idea of the level of interest on the topic of religion and disability, Annandale and Carter invited participants to complete a survey to find out how or if they would use resources to help address issues related to religion and disability, if such resources were offered to them. They included curriculum resources, books, internships/fieldwork ideas, examples of nondiscrimination policies, resources for community life (e.g., worship, discussion groups), and guest speaker recommendations. Responses were provided on a four-point, Likert-type scale (i.e., not at all interested, a little interested, somewhat interested, very interested).

[25] Ibid., 88.

Inclusion of people with different abilities. Interested in the extent to which awareness of disabilities and related issues is a part of the school culture, Annandale and Carter asked respondents (i.e., not at all present, a little present, somewhat present, very present). They also inquired whether people with physical disabilities, emotional or behavioral disabilities, learning disabilities, and intellectual or developmental disabilities were (1) present among students enrolled at their school and (2) present among people employed at their schools. And to approximate the percentage of the students, faculty, and staff at their schools who had disabilities (i.e., none, 1%–5%, 6%–10%, 11%–15%, more than 15%). Pressing this topic further, they asked about the extent to which individuals with disabilities participated in each of four aspects of theological school life: worship leadership, student governance, student organizations, and service opportunities. Again the responses were provided using the five-point, Likert-type scale anchored to the involvement of students without disabilities (i.e., much less than, somewhat less than, about the same as, somewhat more than, much more than).

Accommodations. In Table 6 (Appendix G), participants' responses described the level of accommodations in their school that included physical structures, student housing, flexibility in worship practices for students and faculty over three years. The response options included no accommodations were needed; accommodations have been needed, but we haven't made them yet; some of the needed accommodations have been made; or all of the needed accommodations have been made.

Miscellaneous questions. Well aware of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, better known as the Rehab Act, which mirrors the Civil Rights Law of 1964, the researchers asked schools if they had their own written nondiscrimination policy, whether

such a policy explicitly addressed disabilities, and whether disabilities were addressed in the life of the community and whether they were aware of the policy guideline, Disability and Theological Education, adopted by members of The Association of Theological Schools.

Data collection procedures

The Association of Theological Schools provided Annandale and Carter with email and mailing addresses for 274 academic leaders of its member institutions. In 2012, they sent a letter to the perspective participants describing the study, outlined the steps for completing the survey, and assured the participants that all responses would be kept confidential. The academic dean, or whomever the dean assigned the task, was given three weeks to complete the survey. A link to a web-based version of the survey was also included in this invitation letter along with a paper version of the same survey. Circling back three weeks later, participants received a paper version of the same survey to all individuals who had not yet responded. In addition, the electronic survey was distributed on two more occasions approximately three and nine weeks after the first invitation. Data collection was carried out over a fourteen-week period.

Requesting only one completed version of the survey be submitted on behalf of the institution, Annandale and Carter assigned numbers to each institution and included in on the bottom of each printed survey to better track all incoming surveys and to omit duplicate submissions. The invitation letter indicated that respondents could complete either a web-based or a print version of the survey, but that only one should be submitted on behalf of the organization. No names were collected in this process.

The first fifteen respondents received a $25 Barnes & Noble gift card while others received a resource guide on disabilities for theological schools based on their study

findings. Overall, representatives from 118 theological schools participated in this study, for a strong response rate of 43.1 percent.

Data analysis

Annandale and Carter examined the correlations between school size and the ways in which disability was addressed within the curriculum or as part of the enrollment for 118 respondents the data on tables 1-7.[26] It was collected in the narrative based on the number of responses provided by using Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the association between the seminary size and relevant survey items.

Results

Disability within the theological education curriculum

Out of the 118 schools that participated in the study only 30 schools indicated that they had offered a course specifically focused on disabilities with course titles such as Welcoming People with Disabilities in Worship Communities, Cultivating Communities of Inclusion, Theology of Disability and Suffering, Ministry to the Disabled, and Bioethics: Sickness and Disability in the past three years. When addressing disability extensively in other schools, the mention of disabilities was occasionally or extensively addressed in the areas of pastoral care/pastoral theology/congregational care (91.3 percent) or religious education (70.4 percent). While "27.9 percent of schools never addressed disability within historical studies, 22.4 percent never addressed disability within biblical studies, and 14.7 percent never addressed disability within theology."[27]

[26] Tables 1-7 can be found in Appendix G.

[27] Ibid., 90.

When considering all six areas concurrently, all but eleven respondents indicated that disability was occasionally or extensively addressed in at least one of the six areas. "School size (as measured by total enrollment) was not significantly correlated with the extent to which disability was occasionally or extensively addressed in these areas (r = -.16)."[28]

Although 72 percent of respondents reported that their libraries offered resources related to disabilities and/or disabilities and religion, disability was specifically addressed outside of course work less extensively (see Table 2). Moreover, 37.7 percent of schools did not offer fieldwork specifically focused on disabilities throughout the three years study and 80.0 percent of schools had not offered student publications specifically focused on disabilities in the three-year span. However, when disability-focused activities were offered, they largely occurred infrequently or occasionally.

School size was not significantly correlated with the extent to which disability was occasionally or extensively addressed in these activities (r = .08). Some schools participated in partnerships with university centers on developmental disabilities by engaging in activities to advance disability education in communities of worship, hosting lectures with prominent disability theologians,

> two encouraged participation in camp programs for youth with disabilities; one held student/faculty training on receiving deaf students into the seminary community; and one had a certificate of ministerial formation in American Sign Language. Several schools offered fieldwork in a variety of settings to facilitate student engagement with disabilities and one school developed an inclusive residential program that brought together adults

[28] Ibid.

> with developmental disabilities and theological students in a living community.[29]

Barriers and supports related to addressing disability

Crowded curriculums (48.3 percent) or lack of faculty with expertise (46.2 percent) were the reasons nearly half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed were the reasons for not addressing disabilities within their theological curriculum out of six salient statements (see Table 3). Respondents varied widely in the degree to which they considered each of the six statements to reflect salient barriers to addressing disabilities explicitly within the theological curriculum (see Table 3). Respondents reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that new clergy could best learn about these issues on the job (67.0%) or that their students were unlikely to work with people with different abilities after graduation (86.1%). In addition, Annandale and Carter also proposed eight open-ended responses and found three additional reasons were raised (i.e., a denominational office takes responsibility for helping clergy learn about disability in the field, disability is simply "not on the radar" of schools, and students fear stigma or discrimination if they identify as having a disability). School size was not significantly correlated with ratings of any of these potential barriers.

> At the same time, respondents indicated being fairly interested in accessing most of the identified resources for addressing issues related to religion and disabilities. More than three quarters of respondents indicated that they were somewhat or highly interested in accessing books (81.2%), resources for community life (78.6%), and internship/fieldwork ideas (75.8%). According to respondents, 93.9 percent of schools had a written nondiscrimination policy and 90.8 percent had a policy that specifically addressed disabilities. School size was not significantly correlated with interest in accessing resources (*r* range, -.01 to -.14).[30]

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 91.

Participation of people with different abilities in theological education

Included in this study was also the importance of the physical presence of people with different abilities. Annandale and Carter reported 89.0 percent of schools indicated that students with disabilities were enrolled at their schools. 81.4 percent included students with physical disabilities, 61.0 percent-included students with emotional or behavioral disabilities, and 22.9 percent included students had intellectual or developmental disabilities. This study also asked about faculty or staff, which showed that 47.5 percent of schools employed people with physical disabilities, 24.6 percent employed people with emotional or behavioral disabilities, 20.3 percent employed people with learning disabilities, and 5.9 percent employed people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

> When asked to approximate the percentage of students, faculty, and staff at their schools with disabilities, 4.4 percent said none, 59.6 percent said 1%–5%, 23.7 percent said 6%–10%, 7.9 percent said 11%–15%, and 4.4 percent said more than 15%.[31]

Table 5 shows that the majority of respondents perceived that people with different abilities participated in worship leadership, student governance, service opportunities and student organizations to a similar extent as did students without disabilities (range, 72.0%–82.5% across activities). Here we can see that almost all other respondents indicated that "participation in these activities was somewhat less than, to much less than relative to students without disabilities." In these activities people with different abilities attended campus activities somewhat-less-than, to much-less-than relative to students without disabilities.

[31] Ibid.

Extending their research on the degree to which schools had made or were in of need making accommodations for students and faculty with disabilities was captured in Table 6. This survey reported that more than one third of all schools needed to make accommodations in each of the five areas but had not yet been made or were only partially made. The highest percentages of these two responses were found in the areas of accessible physical structures other than student housing (54.8%); flexibility in class/curriculum requirements and practices (46.9%); and accessible student housing (44.1%).

Preparation of graduates for future ministry

Annandale and Carter's research showed that 70.7 percent of the respondents felt that their graduates were only a little prepared to respond to spiritual and theological questions resulting from disability-related human experiences while 3.4 percent were not prepared at all (see Table 7).

> Only 42.2 percent of respondents said their students were adequately or highly prepared to integrate individuals with disabilities in fellowship, 29.1 percent in worship and ritual, 25.6 percent in religious education, 24.8 percent in service, and 23.9 percent in leadership roles. School size was not significantly correlated with any ratings of preparation (r range, -.04 to .08).[32]

Discussion

A central charge of theological education involves preparing students for ministry in myriad contexts with a broad range of people impacted directly and indirectly by disability. "Indeed, nearly one fifth of all North Americans have a disability, and more than one in four families has a close relative with a disability."[33] Today, with 9,824,711

[32] Ibid., 92.

[33] Ibid.

active cases and 16,070,127 in recovery[34] the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented the possibility for presence and participation of people with different abilities in all aspects of society continue to steadily increase. It is important to consider the avenues through which congregational leaders are equipped to minister to and with people with different abilities and their families. Annandale and Carter designed the survey to ascertain where and how disability appeared in the curricula and overall life of theological institutions. Their study identified barriers, beliefs, and misconceptions that systemically keep disabilities from penetrating the theological curricula, to examine how students with disabilities access campus life and learning opportunities, and to gauge the interest of theological school leaders in supports and resources designed to assist them in addressing disabilities. Their five primary findings of this study extend the literature on religion and disability in important ways.

First, Annandale and Carter's findings suggest a focus on people with different abilities often receives relatively limited attention within the theological curriculum. I found this to be accurate from my findings when interviewing current seminarians and from my own experience.

> Relatively few leaders indicated that disability was addressed extensively in any of the six curricular areas. Although occasionally addressed in courses addressing pastoral care, religious education, and spiritual formation, disability was less frequently addressed in the disciplines of theology, biblical studies, and historical studies. This represents an important omission in terms of student preparation for ministry. When coverage is constrained to particular curricular areas, students may not access the growing volume of scholarship at the intersection of disability, theology, and religion. This growing interdisciplinary field addresses the degree to which people have long struggled to understand mental and

[34] John Elflein, "Covid-19 Cases, Recoveries, Deaths in Most Impacted Countries as of January 29, 2021," Statista, January 29, 2021, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1105235/coronavirus-2019ncov-cases-recoveries-deaths-most-affected-countries-worldwide/ (accessed January 29, 2021).

physical differences and asks how the human experience of disability intersects with, affirms, and challenges major historic theological perspectives and traditions. By limiting attention to disabilities to a particular area, theological educators may be sending a subtle message that disability, an experience of embodied difference, which in fact lifts up some of the most important questions of the human condition, has little to do with the broader theological tradition. This reinforces a long tendency in the theological fields to split the so-called practice disciplines (e.g., homiletics, pastoral care, Christian education) from the so-called academic disciplines.

Second,

Theological schools offered relatively few opportunities for direct involvement with persons with disabilities and disability-related issues outside of the classroom. Fieldwork and internships related to disabilities were reported as being fairly limited during the prior three years. Specifically, less than one quarter of schools offered internships focused on disabilities at least occasionally, while fewer than two fifths offered fieldwork focused on disabilities at least occasionally. Lectures, service and outreach opportunities, and publications related to disabilities were fairly infrequent. Such personal encounters represent powerful opportunities for deepening understanding of disabilities and ministry because they hold potential to facilitate relationships between seminary students and persons with disabilities. Indeed, decades of research on attitude change in multiple areas suggest that contact is among the most consistent factors influencing awareness, understanding, and intentions. Personal encounters add affective learning and experience to the knowledge gains made within the classroom, and thus can contribute to growth in interest and empathy. The impact of the limited availability of these experiences is amplified by the fact that a large proportion of schools not offering field-based experiences also lacked course work. As a result, many students will progress through three or more years of theological training with no exposure to the significant ministerial issues related to disability and few opportunities to develop a theological outlook on disability experiences and how these relate to the call of faith communities.

Third,

They identified several potential challenges associated with addressing disability in the theological curriculum. Limited time, faculty expertise, and available resources were all cited by school leaders as being among the most prominent barriers. In light of these findings, it was not surprising that many respondents also expressed high levels of interest in accessing books, community life resources, internship/fieldwork ideas, and speaker recommendations. While numerous resources on disability

and spirituality have been developed over the last decade, accessing them remains a difficult undertaking as this work is published across disciplines and there is not yet a national clearinghouse where resources related to disability and theology are compiled and disseminated. Such resources could be incorporated within the formal curriculum or shared in order to equip faculty to address disability well in their work with students. At the same time, they considered encouraging the responses of school leaders to two particular survey items listed as potential challenges. Nearly 70 percent of respondents disagreed that disability was an issue clergy could best learn on the job, and nearly 90 percent disagreed that students at their school were unlikely to work with people with disabilities after graduation. Such responses reflect at least implicit recognition among theological school leaders that disability is a relevant and timely issue in the education of future clergy.

Fourth,

Many students with disabilities require accommodations to meaningfully access postsecondary schooling, including theological education. Theological schools in their sample varied widely in the degree to which they viewed themselves as having already made or not actually needing to make particular accommodations on their campuses. However, between one third and one half of respondents indicated that the following accommodations were needed, but they were not yet or only somewhat made: accessible buildings and student housing; flexibility in classroom, curricula, and/or worship practices; and access to needed services and assistance. While some structural renovations can be costly, most accommodations related to classroom and worship activities are not. Indeed, guidance and support to make needed changes could be accessed through partnerships with community agencies and advocacy organizations with deep expertise related to disability. Yet, the absence of these accommodations can prevent students with disabilities from participating fully in theological education and classmates from learning with people with disabilities.

Fifth,

And perhaps most striking, they found that most academic leaders felt that their graduates received little or no preparation that would help them to include people with disabilities into multiple dimensions of congregational life (i.e., fellowship, worship and ritual, religious education, service, and leadership) or to respond to spiritual questions resulting from disability experiences. Although people with disabilities are participating more fully in their wider communities, many clergy in North America are not leaving seminary well prepared to address the needs of a growing proportion of their congregation members. While they acknowledge the very real complexities associated with ensuring that theological schools prepare

> students for the myriad aspects of ministry they may undertake, they were convinced that the ubiquity of disability calls for much greater attention than is currently provided. Better preparation for ministry with persons with disabilities might involve incorporating strong readings and resources related to disabilities into existing course work; making hands-on experience with disabilities available through fieldwork and internship options; providing service and outreach opportunities; and, perhaps most importantly, enabling peer relationships that can only happen when students with disabilities are fully welcomed, supported, and respected as full participants in theological education. While these efforts hold potential to greatly enhance student preparation for ministry in communities that certainly will include people with disabilities, they also will greatly expand students' understanding of what it means to be human—diverse in gifts, inevitably imperfect and inescapably vulnerable, and bound to one another by a moral fabric not of our own creation.[35]

Limitations and future research

Since Annandale and Carter's study only included the perspective of a single administrator, this research could further expand its inquiry to also include the perspectives of other individual faculty and ministry leaders to identify whether and how disability appears within specific courses, programs, campus activities and policies addressed in other spaces unknown to the single responding administrator. Future research could explore exactly how disability is considered when it does receive attention within the curriculum. Studies might focus on sampling syllabi, assignments, and programmatic materials to better understand what particular efforts communicated about disability addressed in course work, field placements, and elsewhere is as important to consider as whether it is addressed. While Annandale and Carter obtained a strong overall response rate, they primarily heard back from those institutions already addressing issues related to disability. So a future study may focus on those non-responding schools that are even less attuned to this area of discussion. Additional research is needed to identify

[35] Annandale and Carter, 92-95.

those factors influencing how and why disability is on the agendas of some schools but not others. Finally, since disabilities can be addressed in both helpful and hurtful ways and the strengths and needs of people with different abilities are diverse, future research could help to distinguish between types of disability (e.g., intellectual, emotional, physical, and learning disabilities) when querying school leaders. It should be emphasized that people with different abilities are a heterogeneous group in their own right and approaches used to support individuals with disabilities such as autism within congregational life may look quite different from those used to include individuals with physical disabilities or visual impairments.

Conclusion

Findings from this study suggest more training is needed in the area of disability in order to adequately prepare students for ministry with the knowledge, attitudes, and practices needed to serve within faith communities of people with different abilities and their families. Moreover, the study highlights theological curriculums where disability does not appear in theological school curricula and the blind spots administrators may have when not having students train in ministry alongside people with different abilities.

> It points to the lack of direct experience with disabilities in the more "hands-on" aspects of theological curricula; it uncovers some of the barriers that keep disabilities out of the curriculum; and it offers some sense of how students with disabilities are participating in theological education.[36]

[36] Ibid., 96.

CHAPTER 4
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCT OF DISABILITY

According to the United States Census Bureau, there are an estimated 40 million people living in the United States with a disability who are not institutionalized. "Exactly who 'people with different abilities' are is not, however, self-evident. The differences among persons with disabilities are often so profound that few areas of commonality exist."[37] Taking a deeper look at this information, the Center of Disease Control and Prevention disaggregated this data by three age groups:

> 18–44 years (young adults), 45–64 years (middle-aged adults), and ≥65 years (older adults). Among young adults, cognitive disability (10.6%) was the most prevalent type. Mobility disability was most prevalent among middle-aged (18.1%) and older adults (26.9%). Generally, disability prevalences were higher among women, American Indians/Alaska Natives (AI/AN), adults with income below the federal poverty level (FPL), and persons in the South U.S. Census region. Disability-specific disparities in health care access were prevalent, particularly among young and middle-aged adults.[38]

In 2019, social workers David R. Hodge and Conroy Reynolds, conducted a quantitative examination of the relationship between spirituality and disability. Their research examined the association between eight measures of spirituality and religion and four common types of disability status (hearing, vision, physical mobility, and

[37] United State Census Bureau, "Disability Characteristics," https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=disabilities&tid=ACSST1Y2018.S1810&hidePreview=false (accessed September 13, 2020).

[38] Catherine A. Okoro, "Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults – United States, 2016," https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6732a3.htm?s_cid=mm6732a3_w#T1_down (accessed September 13, 2020).

emotional/mental) to identify specific spiritual and religious profiles. Their results identified,

> among adults in the United States, close to a third (29.9 percent, n = 891) pray several times a day. Almost two-thirds (63.1 percent, n = 1,874) definitely believe God exists, and roughly a third (33.7 percent, n = 995) believe the Bible represents God's word. Roughly 40 percent reported having some type of spiritual or religious experience that changed their life or altered their orientation toward religion, either positively or negatively. The mean value for religious attendance (M = 3.57, SD = 2.79) indicates that the average American attends services somewhere between several times a year and once a month. Finally, the typical respondent had only some confidence in organized religion (M = 2.03, SD = 0.68).
>
> Regarding disability, the most prominent type of disability reported was related to physical mobility. Roughly 16 percent (n = 451) of the sample reported having limited ability to engage in basic physical activities such as walking or lifting. The prevalence of other types of disabilities was quite similar. Roughly 5 percent of adults reported either a hearing, vision, or emotional or mental disability.
>
> The mean age was approximately 45 years (M = 45.34, SD = 16.55) and the average respondent had completed just over 13 years of education (M = 13.25, SD = 3.21), or the equivalent of one year of college. Just over half the sample were female (54.4 percent, n = 2,454) and married (56.3 percent, n = 2,535), and a clear majority were European American (72.3 percent, n = 3,259).[39]

Here we can see quantitative findings strongly indicate that people with different abilities cope with the challenges they face through their spirituality and religion. "Qualitative data suggest that spirituality is often a source of strength to members of this population. Furthermore, many people with different abilities report that spirituality is a central factor in facilitating adjustment and wellness in their daily lives."[40] For instance 84% of people with different abilities say their faith is important to them; 45% of people

[39] David R. Hodge and Conroy Reynolds, "Spirituality among People with Disabilities: A Nationally Representative Study of Spiritual and Religious Profiles," *Health & Social Work* 44, no. 2 (May 2019): 78-79, https://doi.org/10.1093/hsw/hly035.

[40] Ibid., 75.

with severe disabilities attend a place of worship at least monthly; 10% participate in faith communities that do congregation-wide disability awareness; but 32% of parents changed their place of worship because they felt the environment was not inclusive or welcoming of their disabled child.

At the height of the pandemic, the virus was spreading at such a rapid rate medical professionals struggled to understand its behavior. Initially the virus moved relentlessly through the elderly community (65+ years) causing nursing homes and senior living communities to close its doors to visitors and nonessential workers. Soon after it began to attack middle age people (40+ years) with no solution in sight. Finally, the CDC released statements claiming that the virus was mostly transferable through water droplet from the nose and mouth. So, to reduce some of its strength, guidelines were issued to help reduce the rapid spread of the virus while providing medical professionals with more time to learn about its abilities, patterns and weaknesses. As a result, social gatherings were limited to ten people or less with a social distance of being six-feet apart. The CDC also suggested that people wear facemasks that covered their nose and mouth to decrease the spread of the virus when in public spaces and ventilation was limited such as subways, buses, elevators, airplanes, supermarkets, and churches.[41]

Simply put, the coronavirus emotionally and physically disabled our communities leaving those who already faced challenges further into the margins. Matthew 18:20 tells us, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (NRSV). So, how would church leaders continue to conduct worship services in this inaccessible

[41] As of September 14, 2020, the coronavirus has infected 6.5 million people and taken the lives of 194,000 people in the United States. Worldwide, the virus has infected 29.1 million people and killed 926,000. Medical experts expect those numbers to increase well into 2021.

time and space? How would they provide members with the spiritual food needed to nurture their faith and spirituality? More importantly, now that whole communities were disconnected, disjointed, and endured limitation from their place of faith and worship, could church leaders begin to see their attitudes or misbeliefs as a hindrance in supporting and addressing the inclusivity of people with different abilities in their congregations?

For the past two years, I have been engaging in theological conversations with Pastor James Shepherd of Faith Baptist Church[42] about his theology regarding and addressing the spiritual needs of people with different abilities in his congregation. In our first conversation, Pastor Shepherd acknowledged that he indeed did have a few members of his congregation, 65 years and above, who exhibited challenges with their mobility. I expressed to him that all of us would at some point experience some type of physical disability. Many would experience this in the form of a temporary mobility disability such as a long recovery from a medical procedure or a broken or fractured limb. Permanent disability however, could be the result of an accident or a contracted disease. Still, Pastor Shepherd seemed not to be deeply interested in this theological perspective or of entertaining the idea of creating an inclusive environment. He stated that although the church was accessible and there was only one member who was accompanied by her daughter to interpret for her, the congregation was not ready to move towards this type of theology because there were more pressing issues that he needed to focus on instead of people with different abilities.

[42] The pseudonym of the pastor and church are to protect the privacy of the actual participant and the members of his congregation.

Yet, through the course of this COVID-19 pandemic, Pastor Shepherd shared that he was forced to use a virtual platform to broadcast his morning services because of the health concerns related to the pandemic. At this point his initial concern was about his older members who did not have access to technology needed to view the weekly services such as computers, tablets or updated cellphones. Secondly, since this population resides in a remote part of the United States, internet service would be very limited and inconsistent. I marveled at his dilemma. Here, I was able to help him shift his mindset by explaining that this could be seen as some type of disability. He pondered this suggestion and began to see the connection. Although he was no longer conducting service in the traditional way of in-person worship services, he was intentionally focusing on the needs of his members regardless of their abilities and realized that he was able to reach more people than he had pre-COVID. He also stated that using this virtual platform allowed him to reach out to those who were normally apprehensive about entering the church building. In a recent interview, Pastor Shepherd expressed his joy about the increasing number of people who were seeking membership in his congregation. He spoke especially of one particular group of people who were taking an interest.

Here, Pastor Shepherd humbly shared his insight on how the movement from strictly holding church service in the traditional way marginalized a group of people whom Jesus seemed to flock to. He was aware of one particular member who infrequently attends morning service with her daughter so that she could interpret the sermon for her using American Sign Language but he didn't know that when he decided to hire the women's daughter to sign beside him while they were live streaming, a whole community gained access to their desirable faith.

Below is an excerpt from one of our discussions about his theological perspective in regards to including people with different abilities in the church community.

Monika: Has the pandemic had an impact on your theological perspective in regards to people with different abilities?

Church Leader: So we started asking the questions, who are we leaving out and how do we get to them? What do we do? How do we keep them involved? How can we connect? So while we were on that, while we were on that question, we had to go further and say, well who else is out there? Who haven't we connected with, or who can't we connect with? And for us it became the hearing impaired. Hit the top of the list because we had a mother who would come to church and her daughter would sit next to her when she would come and kind of sign to her what was going on in the service. When that wasn't feasible, this same mother was going to church at a Jehovah's Witness church an hour away because that church offered sign language. And so, then we developed an opportunity for this daughter, who we had talked to before just you know, this was a post COVID situation. We talked to her about the being skilled in this so we could offer this ministry. And as timing would have it, she had just come to kind of like graduating her first phase, if you will, of the training. And in that first phase of graduation, through this pandemic opportunity we're on the internet now we're doing Facebook Live or whatever, live streaming. We gave her the opportunity not to just minister to her mom, but to others through signing the service that we have now on the television, and it happens with a great response. Immediately, there was 10 to 15 hearing impaired people and they have their own community out there, didn't know that, they have their own internet community out there, they contact each other and so it hit quickly that Faith Baptist had a

person signing, the next thing we know they, they are in worship. And the blessing was, they were also able to be in their own faith tradition. Because they were just taking whatever they could get so they could get some kind of word in them. So the pandemic pushed us into that, the pandemic made us more impactful. The first thing that came into fruition on that.

Despite numerous attempts to engage in other theological conversations with pastors, ministry leaders, or Sunday school teachers about how they were currently supporting people with different abilities in their Sunday school classes or adults in their weekly Bible studies, I experienced a lot of resistance when even trying to approach the topic. After all, John chapter 20 verses 24-29, tells the narrative of the disciple named Thomas who was skeptical about the resurrection of Jesus. He is in disbelief about what his fellow disciples saw. He states, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." As previously mentioned in chapter 2, Jesus was disabled at a later point in his life, which I believe is a demonstration of his last example of an opportunity to embrace the perspective of liberation theology through the lens of disability. While I acknowledge the very real complexities associated with ensuring that there is neither a stigma nor a lack of foundational knowledge around the disabled community, I believe theological institutions must better prepare students with disability liberation theology for effective ministry as a whole. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose" (1Corinthians 12:12,18 NRSV).

CHAPTER 5
LET US EXHALT HIS NAME TOGETHER

There is a prejudice and unacknowledged stigma against people with different abilities in our society as a whole, but in our church communities that stigma is upheld by traditional religious practices and readings that are often at odds with modern perspectives. At the very core of our social structures is an implicit bias, which may stem from the ancient Greek term physiognomy—physis meaning "nature" and gnomon meaning "judge" or "interpreter." Simply put, it is the practice of assessing a person's character or personality based on their outer appearance. This ancient pseudo-science term was and is *still* used to categorize "normal and fully developed bodies" with "normal or fully developed" high levels of morals, emotional, physical, intellectual and psychological abilities. Since a disabled or deformed body is considered to have been flawed, it is assumed that the character and personality of the disabled or deformed person's levels of morals, emotional, physical, intellectual and psychological abilities are also flawed. This is the typical human response. Yet, when Moses reminds God, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." God responds in his divine posture that it is he, "Who gives speech to mortals, Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind" (Exodus 4:10-11). Here we can see that God is fully aware of Moses' physical limitations, yet he was confident that he chose the right person to fulfill his expectations.

In my prophetic imagination, I believe the Bible, in its entirety, provides a transformational blueprint for faith leaders in regards to embracing people with different abilities. I suggest there are two dimensions to God's nature that shape the way he deals with humankind and for church leaders to follow. He first demonstrates his love and acceptance with the way in which he pays attention to every detail in "every living thing." He then entrusts man with the responsibility to not only name his creations but to also care for them. This is the first commandment because it is the first lesson of how we are to treat others. We are to treat others with an acute attention to detail because of the "goodness" in which they were created.

The second dimension of God's nature is based on the concept of how a relationship is established and maintained. When God's relationship with Adam and Eve is breached, God demonstrates a divine measure of grace and mercy that reaches out to the physically, morally and spiritually imperfect to declare that everything is perfect in his sight (2 Corinthians 12:9). Furthermore, this covenant is established with all of the living things—disabled or deformed—created in his image. Furthermore, the number of statements and commandments regarding the treatment of people with different abilities is not simply one of care but one of justice and opportunity. The prophets, some of which were physically disabled, or who eventually became mentally disabled, propounded that all are faithful followers, stewards, partners, and collaborators in the kingdom building of God where everyone has a place and a sense of purpose, where the whole community of believers takes responsibility for ensuring that those on the margin have the same opportunity to serve God because:

> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no

> need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (1 Corinthians 12:20-26).

Embedded within all aspects of our Christian culture, our human condition is strongly linked with the development and enforcements of human rights—even secularism relies upon organized faith in order to fulfill its relevance and validity in public life. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is the most comprehensive federal civil rights statute protecting the rights of people with different abilities. If fact, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the template for the ADA. This legislation ensures access to employment; state and local government programs and services; access to places of public accommodation such as businesses, transportation, and nonprofit service providers; and telecommunications. Yet, The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) exempted religious institutions from being obligated to adhere to this civil rights law.

Church communities often embrace people with different abilities as an afterthought when it comes to the physical structure of church buildings. For example, most structures are not built with a universal design for accessibility. Wheelchair ramps are inconveniently placed on the side or the back of a building structure after the initial blueprints were designed. Today, all church buildings are required to have accessible restrooms and elevators if necessary, yet many are still out of compliance in some regard, making it a spiritual barrier for those who are physically disabled. Amos Yong writes,

> There are many reasons why people with disabilities perceive the church as not being particularly welcoming to them. First, and foremost are the uninterrogated theological assumptions linking sin, the lack of faith, and disability, and about healing and curing of disability—all of which combine to undergird the biases, fears, and stigmatizations inhibiting the formation a more disability-welcoming church. Then, even the extensive history of the Church's charitable services to people with disabilities, these have more often than not perpetuated paternalistic postures and practices toward such groups of people. As a result, the "disabled" are not seen first and foremost as people created in the image of God but as "burdens" to be carried.[43]

Moreover, "[p]arents struggle to find a faith community that will embrace their child; congregations express uncertainty with how to extend a meaningful welcome; and service providers wrestle with how best to support people with disabilities and their families in this important dimension of life."[44] So, after speaking with some religious leaders about their vision for intentionally including more people with different abilities in their weekly worship services, I found four major reasons and or barriers which hindered them from moving towards a more inclusive environment. Most stated are (1) "There were more pressing issues and communal needs." (2) They believed that there weren't that many people with different abilities within their church community. (3) Fighting the stigmas that undermine and limit people with different abilities was challenging and complex for their congregants. (4) Although they wanted to be inclusive, they just didn't know how and more importantly where to begin.

[43] Amos Yong, "Disability from the Margins to the Center: Hospitality and Inclusion in the Church," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 15 (2011): 339-50.

[44] Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 2007), 2.

Definition of Disability

The ADA defines a person with a disability as person who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more *major life activities*, (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment.[45] Major life activities include walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and performing manual tasks. Although the ADA of 1990 does not specifically name all of the impairments that are covered, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 clarified that the definition of disability was meant to be interpreted broadly and expanded the list of life activities to include reading, concentrating, standing, lifting, bending and others. The amendments also made it clear that the term "substantially limits" must be interpreted broadly. Disabilities such as depression, diabetes, asthma or anxiety, or digestive disorders with symptoms that are episodic or in remission must be considered as if they are active. They must also be considered even if a person uses "mitigating measures," such as medication or assistive technology that lessen the impact of a person's disability.

From Pulpit to the Pews

Many people with different abilities have spiritual needs that are not being met and gifts that are not being exercised in the context of congregational worship. Creating a course for seminarians to explore both the complexities of theological perceptions and practices concerning disability theology and the ensuing challenges of faith and fellowship for people with different abilities experience may increase and broaden

[45] ADA, "Glossary of ADA Terms," https://adata.org/glossary-terms#D (accessed February 1, 2021).

memberships while building stronger communities among those who live in close relationship with them within the contemporary Church.

Over the last ten years, and especially this year during this COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship between churches and those with disabilities has shifted. Today, writes Amy E. Jacober, "there are many more churches with ministries for children, adolescents, and adults with special needs. There are even more churches who have created space for the integration of people with special needs into the life of the church."[46] One way to bring forward this process is to first introduce participants to disability theology as an avenue through which to examine our theological and anthropological assumptions while simultaneously enhancing our abilities to live, work, and interact with others in a diverse world. A course would begin with an introduction to various discourses on disability, including history and methodology. The course would then require seminarians to examine and thoughtfully evaluate a variety of theological structures based on the lens of disability, while simultaneously attending to other differences of embodied and constructed difference.

The test of such structures will come in the form of ethical reflection and review, particularly in the contexts of bioethics. A final project will offer students the ability to put such reflection into practice. Through this process, the student would

1. Become familiar with the field of disability theology, including reflection on issues such as the nature of God, humanity, suffering, and healing.

[46] Amy Jacober, *Redefining Perfect: The Interplay between Theology and Disability* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 49.

2. Gain a basic familiarity with the language, history, methodology, principal sources, and primary issues related to the field of disability studies.
3. Have the opportunity to engage in ethical reflection on issues of justice, morality, and responsibility in relation to living in a diversely embodied world.
4. Be equipped for competent and respectful interaction and service in relation to people with different abilities in their ministries. (See Appendix A)

CHAPTER 6
IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

To produce a quality dissertation using the Action Research Model, the researcher is most likely to seek out problems to study in their own contexts because they want the research to eventually make and have an impact on a particular setting, usually one that the researcher is socially or physically connected to, writes researcher Kathryn Herr. The settings can be reflective in nature of a community characterized by conflicting values and a disproportion of resources and power making the notion of the researcher's reflexivity a crucial element. The action researcher must then question received conceptions or misconceptions for improvement or solutions. In this case, the methodology of the researcher, who is identified as the outsider in this model, must be tempered by the collaboration of the insiders who are the participants or subjects. This, according to Kathryn Herr, will make the action in the research its central focus and ultimately produce benefits to the community at large from the undertakings of co-learning through inclusive participation, which will generate a new understanding of human development to which more effective policies and practices can be grounded.[47]

Over the past thirty years, I have worked in the field of education as a special education teacher and never even heard of the term action research. Yet, according to what you just read, I was doing exactly that. I was always sure to consider ethical

[47] Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 2.

guidelines to protect my students' dignity, confidentiality, and anonymity when interviewing and observing and constantly engaged in the implementation of plan-reflect-observe-act cycles. Since my students were active and sometimes willing participants the process only produced technical challenges that we would work through the next day. But would I be able to bring what I learned from Herr and my lived experience to getting a community of church leaders to engage in conversations about their theological perceptions and practices concerning people with different abilities and the ensuing challenges of fellowship for them and those who live in close relationship with them within their congregations?

Plan

I initially intended to create case studies with three churches that were similar in demographics, denomination, and leadership styles. I had planned to complete initial site visits and conduct formal interviews with identified ministry leaders because I wanted to know:

1. To what extent was disability addressed within their theological education curriculum?
2. What attitudes or misplaced beliefs hindered church leaders in supporting and addressing the inclusivity of people with different abilities within their congregations?
3. How could ministry leaders create and maintain inclusive environments for the presence and participation of people with different abilities?

I also intended to interview church members to gather their theology regarding people with different abilities and engage in a one on one case study with a pastor who once confessed that the topic of people with different abilities was not a top priority. For the purpose of protecting the confidentiality of my participants, I will refer to the

churches as Church A, Church B, and Church C, and case study participants as Church Member and Church Leader.

September-October 2019

In my informal conversation with the Pastor of Church A, I was provided with the contact information for the youth ministry leader and was given permission to initiate site visits. Through phone calls and emails we set up dates for me to come and conduct my initial walkthrough. After my walkthrough I interviewed the ministry leader to hear her thoughts, concerns and questions about my action plan. Here, she disclosed that although many of the group leaders were dedicated to working within this ministry, she was aware of ten to fifteen students she felt had "deep and different needs," and that the staff was unskilled to handle such delicate situations and students. Still, after numerous attempts of trying to setup meetings to discuss an action plan with Church A, I realized that this data required me to shift my focus to the real barrier. It wasn't that the ministry leaders were not interested in this topic, but as I had heard before, it was not a top priority for them. Acknowledging this too as data, I shifted my focus.

November-December

I was directed to speak with the Director of Christian Education and Discipleship of Church B who was already engaged in the disability liberation theology conversation and was in the process of establishing a "Special Strengths Ministry." Church B presented the willingness to engage in this action research cycle with full disclosure.

My initial informal conversation with the pastor of Church C was inspiring. Although this conversation was short, he conveyed his interest in the proposal and requested that we set up a time to formally discuss my intentions and action plans. As time went by, I realized my attempts to reconnect with the Pastor of Church C were

uneventful and yielded no results. I began to wonder if ministry leaders who took a course in seminary regarding people with different abilities before entering church communities as ministry leaders could better bring this theological concept to the forefront. So, I applied to Western Theological Seminary's Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry program to deepen my biblical knowledge and broaden my theological insights. I then began to work on a proposal to create an intensive course syllabus to explore the intersectionality of faith and disability with seminary students as my new case study.

I am a graduate of New York Theological Seminary who continues to subscribe to its vision statement which states, "We are a diverse and inclusive community of learners providing resources, tools, and strategies for effective leadership, preparing humans to engage to prophetic and transformative ministry and promoting love and respect for creator and creation." I desire to move boldly into the mission and values statements "preparing faith and thought leaders to engage in relevant, restorative and revolutionary ministry." By "providing a relevant and rigorous theological education that is accessible, inclusive and transformative," students will "engage in deeper authentic relationships with the creator and all of the creation,"[48] and that should include disability liberation theology. If I believed all of this, I wondered, could I possibly design a certificate program for New York Theological seminary students who could participate in this action research? I submitted my proposal to my advisor who suggested I present it to the Dean of Academics at New York Theological Seminary to see if the school would allow

[48] New York Theological Seminary, "Mission and Vision Statement," https://www.nyts.edu/about-nyts/mission-statement/ (accessed February 2, 2021).

me to facilitate an intensive summer course in July of 2020 to investigate my ideas about this theological shift in cultural competency. I was invited to speak with the Dean of Academics at New York Theological Seminary to discuss my course proposal and was informed that although I had their support in bringing this course forward, a new dean was being appointed in January and I should expect to hear from the new dean once the transition was complete.

January- February

In January of 2020, I was accepted into the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry program at Western Theological Seminary, resubmitted my proposal to the newly appointed dean and waited for a response.

During this time, I was preparing to complete another mission trip to Ethiopia and Kenya, which I usually take during the third week of February. I informed the Director of the Special Strength's Ministry of Church B that I would be in contact upon my return. Bits of news began to filter through the sporadic news stations in East Africa about a virus that was spreading in Wuhan, China, and was rapidly spreading to other countries. To our knowledge, "the virus" had not arrived in the United States and we thought it would be contained shortly. Yet, when we arrived home on February 22, 2020 the virus, having arrived exactly one month earlier, was making its way into the state of New York. On March 16th, Mayor Bill de Blasio, shut down all New York City Public Schools and Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order closing down all non-essential business. By April, New York City had become the epicenter of the global pandemic. March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, and according to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, "we will be working remotely and practicing social distancing far into the year

2021." Only left with my coaching sessions with the Church Leader, I began to focus more on developing the course.

Day 1: Course Introduction – Students will become familiar with the common terms and the thirteen legal categories for exceptionalities. This session would be dedicated to the exploration of the disparaging imagery and tone that is often seen and heard in conversations concerning people with different abilities. Using selected readings from *The Disabilities Studies Reader* by Lennard J. Davis, students will engage in deep discussions about their own level of cultural responsiveness regarding people with different abilities in order to unpack their own personal, professional, and institutional views, and the religious constructs they may unknowingly be upholding.

Day 2: Cognitive effects and disability – Students will examine the manifestations of the thirteen legal categories for exceptionalities to gain a better understanding of their characteristics and how they may manifest themselves differently in each individual person with disabilities. Once observed, the student will be able to support the person with disabilities while helping them maintain their dignity and respect through the lens of cultural responsiveness.

Day 3: Intersections of disability and religion (scriptural, historical and contemporary exploration) – Here students will be required to complete assignments and readings from *God of the Oppressed* by James H. Cone, and *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice* edited by Nancy Eiesland and Don E. Saliers. These texts will help students identify the secular inequalities that people with different abilities face as a social construct and provide them with theological perspectives to reassess their leadership practices. This session is intended to dismantle

misconceptions and disrupt systemic triggers of oppression with regard to people with different abilities in the church community. Students will begin to explore ways to create entry points of inclusivity within their ministry.

Day 4: Three models: Accessible God, Interdependent God, Disabled God – This session will require students to use their prophetic imagination and further challenge their theological perspective. Students will choose from the selected readings from *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations* by Erik W. Carter, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* by Kathy Black, and *Copious Hosting: A Theology of Access for People with Disabilities* by Jennie Weiss Block to help them develop strategies, activities, or initiatives to demonstrate their level of cultural competency in implementing culturally responsive inclusive practices for people with different abilities in their field of ministry.

Day 5: Disability in the first person – This session will allow students to engage in direct theological discussions with people with different abilities and those who care for them such as parents, caregivers, partners and relatives.

Day 6: Ethical concerns related to medical and minority understandings of disability – Here we will circle back to Lennard Davis' text, *Disability Studies Reader*, to investigate the juxtaposition of bioethics and disability through case studies.

Day 7: Understanding the Individualized Education Program (IEP) – Students will be required to review an IEP to understand that it is the cornerstone of the special education process and the tool used in the public education systems as one of the main resources that document the progress of a person with disabilities. This session will be dedicated to the community outreach needed to support persons with cognitive and

emotional challenges in the larger community. Students will also be required to obtain other resources from the Muslim and Jewish communities of faith to explore their ministry practices.

Day 8: Theory into practice: self-critically relating to and working in a world of difference – As a culminating activity, students will attend Special Olympics Training Clubs or the like to foster an attitude of openness. Students will begin to experience salvation and spirituality in a different way, moving them towards a desire to be supportive and inclusive of people with different abilities and their families by embracing a theology of liberation with an understanding that ministering is reciprocal and not one-sided.

The instructions of the Great Commission were given to the disciples in Matthew chapter 10 but can be seen as God's re-statement of his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12. The Commission charged the disciples to "proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out demons" (Matthew 10:7-8) and possesses the vision and mission statements for all nationalities and diverse ministries for the Kingdom of God.[49] It challenges the followers of Jesus Christ to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

The course was designed to take students not only through the medical point of view of Jesus's injuries but the unpacking of a theology that may have been hidden by countless stories of healings described throughout the Bible. You see from my research, I

[49] Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 115-118.

have found that our desire to see Jesus as a perfect human being falls within the theological construct that every good and perfect thing comes from God, yet, the Roman crucifixion – a well-documented methodical event – made me look at Jesus' execution through another lens of faith.

Anatomists like Dr. Joseph Bergeron suggest Jesus' health began to deteriorate in the Garden of Gethsemane when he began to sweat blood. This is physically possible he states when hematidrosis (bloody sweat) occurs under great emotional stress.[50] Tiny capillaries in the sweat gland can break and mix with the sweat demonstrating in Luke's account that, "His sweat became as drops of blood" (Luke 22:44).

After his arrest, Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin and Caiaphas the high priest and it is here where Dr. Bergeron suggest Jesus experiences his first physical trauma. First, soldiers would strike him in his face when he wouldn't respond to Caiaphas's questions and then appeared in front of Pilate battered, bruised, and dehydrated to only be sentenced to being scourged and then crucified.

Here Jesus would be stripped of his clothes, hands tied high above his head, and received at least the Jewish law of 40 lashes. The flagellum, made of several leather thongs with two small balls of lead attached to the ends would cut their way through Jesus' flesh, tissue and finally muscle across his shoulders, back and legs.[51]

When Jesus is untied, he falls to the ground into his own pool of blood after the centurion in charge determined he was near death. Still the Roman soldiers continue their mockery and threw a robe over his shoulders and placed a stick in his hand as a scepter

[50] Joseph W. Bergeron, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: A Medical Doctor Examines the Death and Resurrection of Christ* ([Suwanee, GA]: St. Polycarp Publishing House, 2018), 15.

[51] Ibid., 19.

and twisted a band of thorn twigs into a crown to complete their insult. They push the crown of thorns onto his scalp and it too begins to bleed because it is one of the most vascular areas of the body but nothing could have been more excruciating than the re-opening of his wounds on his back when they tore the robe off again.

Let's be clear, Jesus never carried the entire cross as it has been depicted in various illustrations, he only carried the patibulum (the cross bar). The weight of the patibulum at this point was too heavy for him to bear having suffered all of those beatings and the lashes he may have received on the way to his execution. So it is important that we take a deeper look at Luke's account of this event in chapter 23:26-27.

Here he writes, "As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him." Here I suggest, Simon likely felt the blood of Jesus and even touched the broken body of Christ on that day, but I would also like to use my prophetic imagination and propound that it is at this moment where we can definitively locate the intersectionality of disability and faith. Jesus, savior of all, healer of many was–in some capacity by medical standards–disabled. Jesus needed the support; the centurion commanded the support; and Simon provided the support for our disabled God. Simply put, at that moment, Jesus needed the help of an able bodied person to stand in place for him to fulfill the faith believer's prophecy. Although this might seem blasphemous, one might consider that Jesus was also demonstrating his ability to reconcile himself with man through his own moment of disability. This liberating demonstration provides Simon a personal and unique experience that likely led him to

come to faith in Jesus because history tells us that Simon was a Jew who would later preach the Gospel to the Greeks as a Christian evangelist and also lead his sons Alexander and Rufus into ministry.

The narrative we have come to believe is that a person with a disability needed faith to do God's work such as Moses, Jacob, Paul and the like. Yet, in Thomas and particularly Simon's case, Jesus shows us that sometimes it's the person with a disability that needs to show the nonbeliever what faith is, what it looks like, and more importantly what it does.

CHAPTER 7
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES

Before beginning my work as a Master of Divinity student at New York Theological Seminary I was asked to complete a Hermeneutical Inventory. The tool consisted of 20 questions, which helped me distinguish between my inherited faith and my newly informed theological perspective. Simply put, this process shook the core of my spiritual foundation and challenged me to take a deeper look into my spirituality. Glad to have been finished with that process, I was surprised to learn that I had to revisit that experience again when entering the Doctorate of Ministry program. Not only did I question the request but I also pushed back on its validity. Reluctantly, I completed the tool and realized this second process actually helped me further ground my faith in systematized hermeneutical principals, which eventually helped me identify and own my spiritual agency. Having completed both of these assessments, I wasn't surprised to learn that I now needed to complete a Ministerial Competencies Self-Assessment, which asked me to explore and assess my gifts for ministry and acknowledge my limitations.

From the beginning of this process, my Site Team members were well aware of my call to ministry and knew that I believed that I was called to work in the field of missions and not from the pulpit. So, upon our discussions about my role and performance in my ministry they focused more on my ability to effectively address contemporary concerns and needs, ensure the future of the faith community and the integrity of its message and launching an internet campus. (See Appendix F.)

Preacher

I have determined that leadership is the ability to elevate, motivate, and convince a group or community to move towards a common goal. However, I believe that responsibility is not solely placed on the preacher as Ephesians 4:11-13 tells us,

> The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

So, as a lifelong educator and learner, I consider myself a *Treacher* (a teacher who often finds themselves teaching and preaching simultaneously) because a religious educator challenges the hearer to discover a new, spiritually enlightened consciousness about themselves and society.

My ability to address contemporary concerns and needs effectively was a competency my site team determined that I needed to hone in on in order to develop a course that was relative to the faith community. During my initial process of determining what my demonstration project would be, I spent a lot of time discussing the contemporary issues I advocated daily in my secular ministry as a special education teacher and its juxtaposition with my spiritual ministry.

I applied to Western Theological Seminary to enroll in the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry Program and registered to attend the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability in May of 2020, which was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technology/Social Media Management

Initially, this competency was not a focal point for me. Over the years I refrained from engaging in any social media platforms as a way to protect my individual privacy

and maintain a low profile. This strategic practice was to establish my own ethical standards as a public school teacher. However, my site team stressed the importance of creating or joining a social media platform. Collectively they expressed that when done properly, joining a social media platform could possibly yield positive networking connections and foster favorable exposure that was vital to sustaining a relevant and successful ministry.

Although some of my interviews were conducted over the phone, they didn't provide the intimacy an in-person interview creates and since researchers strongly suggested the practice of social distancing would help to lower the risk of contracting the virus, I had to find a reliable and cost effective way to conduct my interviews with pastors. I wanted to discuss and hear about the challenges they were facing in the wake of the pandemic and provide them with an outlet to express and speak their truths in a safe environment. Yet, the only way to do this and continue to practice social distancing was to utilize a video communications platform. I emailed my perspective participants letters of consent and asked them to attend the virtual meetings.

From this success, I asked the members of my cohort if they would be interested in meeting once a month to participate in a wellness check since we were now all experiencing a form of spiritual, emotional, and physical disability. Through this online engagement, all participants have shared challenges as well as successes, while remaining motivated to complete monthly benchmarks towards our ultimate goal.

Over the past five months I have realized the importance of this competency and its ability to enhance my effectiveness when conducting and creating a welcoming and affirming environment for all participants regardless of their mental and physical ability.

Whether in person or remotely, every person I interviewed stated the importance of their need to socially, emotionally and spiritually connect through interpersonal communication and physical proximity and not being able to do that was spiritually challenging as pastors. I believe creating this space helped them rethink their perspectives on how to create inclusive environments for people with different abilities.

Witness or Evangelist

As a new believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I was trained and understood that it was my duty to inform others about the love of Jesus Christ and his ability to change the current conditions of their hearts and minds.

When we take a critical look at how our answer to the call of ministry correlates with the overall mission of Christ, we can suggest that social justice is at the core because the universal proclamation of the gospel is demonstrated through the universality of the gospel it proclaims.[52] Unlike the invitation to Christ, the call to ministry isn't optional, but a command (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:44-49) and will always remain *undefinable* and *unconfinable.*

Through this project, I am continuing to ensure that the future of the faith community and the integrity of its message is inclusive by engaging ministry leaders in the exploration of the ways in which ministry to and with those who are marginalized in our society can also amplify and demonstrate the "good news" of Jesus Christ through the complexities of a disability liberation theology.

[52] David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry: Preparing a People for the Presence of the Lord* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 44.

CONCLUSION

In my research, I have ascertained that church communities have usually responded to people with different abilities as a social burden, requiring some type of physical accommodation, rather than seeing them as a potentially abled integral parts of the body of Jesus Christ. The message of the "Good News" and the decree of "The Great Commission" do not exclude people with different abilities and therefore demonstrate the universality of the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Often, we hear of ministry leaders and faith communities intentionally attending to the needs of the poor and the homeless because we have come to acknowledge and accept that "there will always be poor among us" (Matthew 26:11), but we seem to skip over the background of that scripture and its social context. If we exegete the text properly we will find Jesus is making this statement to his disciples after they have seen him heal the blind, made the lame to walk, cast out demons and raise people from the dead (John 9:1-12, Luke 5:17-26, Matthew 8:28-34, John 11:1-44, Mark 5:21-43). At this particular moment, I often wonder why the disciples were so concerned with Mary and her expensive oil (Matthew 26:7) while not questioning Jesus about why they were even sitting in the house of Simon the Leper. Let me remind you that leprosy is an infectious skin disease that causes bumps and wounds under the skin, which can gradually spread and cause muscle weakness, nerve damage, and paralysis. If not treated properly, it can result in the loss of body parts

and eventually death.[53] Here I suggest that although Simon may not have been poor, he definitely had been socially excluded since leprosy was a disease that required one to live in social isolation while they recovered from it (Leviticus 13:45-46).

Unlike leprosy, the long-term side effects of COVID-19 are still being discovered. The Center of Disease Control and Prevention is still learning about the wide range of health concerns associated with the disease as the pandemic continues to unfold. As of the December 6, 2020, the United States has reported approximately 14,932,613 cases and 283,621 deaths. Currently the state of New York is reporting that 87,949 people have recovered[54] and have returned to normal activities but some patients have symptoms that have lasted weeks or even months after their recovery from the acute illness such as cardiovascular, respiratory, renal, dermatologic, neurological, and psychiatric complications while others have lost limbs from blood clots caused by the virus known as Acute limb ischemia.[55] Like Simon the Leper we will have COVID-19 survivors among us who may suffer some form of disability who were once considered able-bodied people.[56]

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[53] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Hansen's Disease (Leprosy)," https://www.cdc.gov/leprosy/index.html (accessed February 10, 2017).

[54] Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, Coronavirus Resource Center, "COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)," December 7, 2020, https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html.

[55] Mario Ariza, "Doctors See Rise in Limb-Threatening Blood Clots during Covid-19 Crisis," *South Florida SunSentinel*, August 15, 2020, https://www.sun-sentinel.com/coronavirus/fl-ne-south-florida-doctors-report-coronavirus-amputation-20200815-zt4b7heizbcbroauxuzvm4pnhu-story.html (accessed February 2, 2021).

[56] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Long-Term Effects of COVID-19," November 13, 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects.html (accessed February 2, 2021).

Building our capacity to be authentic culturally responsive ministry leaders who can help people with different abilities maintain their spiritually and faith journeys is what we are sent to do (Luke 4:43). If we continue to perpetuate a system that placates the very problematic social structures of exclusivity instead of teaching ministry leaders how to directly disrupt and dismantle this exclusive theology, the dominant assumptions we make about people with different abilities —that there is something wrong with them, especially if their physical appearance fails to sequence well dominant forms of being–we are assuming that a person with a disability is not included in God's kingdom and that everything that He created was not good (Genesis 1:31).

For far too long, the theological perspective on people with different abilities has created social and spiritual barriers that are embedded in the idea that a disability is the result of some kind of sinful punishment and people with different abilities should be isolated or excluded from any type of divine leadership role in the faith community. People with different abilities are not those who virtuously endure physical or intellectual suffering, are not examples to teach or encourage passive acceptance of social barriers for the sake for obedience to God, and are not charity cases.

I plan to first resubmit my proposal to the Dean of Academics at New York Theological Seminary, and hope that the institution is interested in engaging in this theological conversation on disability liberation. By allowing me to facilitate an intensive summer course in July of 2021, I believe the seminary can help me continue my investigations about this theological shift in ministerial cultural competency while remaining relevant in this newly traumatized and polarized era. I also plan to submit this course proposal to other seminaries and Bible schools in the tri-state area to offer a

prophetic imagination that owes nothing to the dominant imagination. The course would require seminarians to examine and thoughtfully evaluate a variety of theological structures through the lens of disability, while simultaneously attending to other embodied and constructed difference. It will provoke an uncommon courage in the minds of women and men called to ministry, requiring them to give attention to the unique gifts and needs of people with different abilities who will be present in their congregations and communities for years to come.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Demonstration Project Proposal

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO FAITH & LEARNING DISABILITIES

By

MONIKA CUMMINGS-CRUSOE

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

October 2019

Challenge Statement

As a Regional Special Education Training Specialist of the Christian Faith, I have held various Christian education positions within the church. As a Curriculum Writer for Youth Church breakout sessions and workshops, I observed youth leaders engaging in lessons, activities, and sermons without considering students with learning disabilities. This research project will look at how the church provides support for the education and formation – spiritual and otherwise – of children with developmental and cognitive disabilities?

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

Geographic Location

There are approximately 400 places of worship in Harlem, New York City. On any given day of the week Baptists, Black Muslims, Episcopalians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists and various others gather together to demonstrate and participate in their religious denomination. Out of those 400 or so places of worship, the Abyssinian Baptist Church has been identified as one of the top mega-churches in the Harlem community. (Harlem Heritage) At 132 West 138th Street, sits The Abyssinia Baptist Church. Nestled between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Lenox an area, which most Harlemites describe as Strivers' Row. Today, this section of Harlem is called the St. Nicholas Historic District. (White 543) The church was built between 1922-1923 by Charles W. Bolton & Son. Iron gates and large red painted wooden doors accent its stained glass window giving it a "Collegiate Gothic" look. Its origin was established in 1808 by free blacks that refused to worship with congregations where they were not welcomed. Although there is no myth about its origin, the naming of the church has be challenge by scholars like Genna Rae McNeil. Here, she suggests the historical and religious link of the church to the name and its connection to the country of Ethiopia is questionable. For instance, McNeil points out that since the New World imported coffee primarily from countries such as Haiti, Martinique and Cuba, it was unlikely that Ethiopian merchant seamen traveled to New York to trade. In addition, Protestant missionaries were not successful in converting Ethiopians to Christianity until the middle nineteenth century so it was highly unlikely that the Ethiopian seamen would be looking for a Baptist congregation to

worship with. Moreover, the terms, "African," "Negro," and "Abyssinian" were used interchangeably to refer blacks in America. Hence, the naming of the church, – African Baptist Church, may have just been a way for discriminated blacks to finally link their heritage to the continent of Africa. Consistent with the naming of other black churches during this time period, minister Thomas Paul, a free black man from Boston may have chosen the name Abyssinia because it was the original name of the country of Ethiopia. (Witness 1-6) Still, in 1954, Emperor Haile Salassie I visited the Abyssinia Baptist Church and offered a seven-foot brass handmade Ethiopian cross as a post-World War II connection between modern Ethiopia and its ancient namesake to Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.. Since then the cross has become the official symbol of the church and sits in the center of the alter.[1]

Setting & Demographics

Abyssinian's Youth Ministry is the umbrella for five other programs, which supports their youth in spiritual growth and development. First, the Nursery focuses on children ages 0-5 year olds. These children are dropped off for the entire morning worship service. The Worship Experience for Youth (WE) is the name for the Sunday school and serves children from 6-16 years old. The Blue Nile is a rights' of passage program for boys and girls from 10-16 and focuses on African American culture, traditions, and practices. Additionally the Youth Ministry is also involved in community-based programs, which are open to non-members of Abyssinian such as Youth on the Move, which focuses on sporting events and activities. During the summer

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[1] Genna Rael McNeil, *Witness: Two Hundred Years of African-American Faith and Practice at the Abyssinian Baptist Church of Harlem, New York* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 215.

Abyssinian also provides the community with two weeks of vacation bible school which is also open to non-members of the church. Overall, there are 180-200 students who are served consistently by the Youth Ministry excluding the youth on the move and vacation bible school. All of the programs mentioned above except for the Youth on the Move program, are held in the vestry of the church.

Focus Group

Since the Worship Experience for Youth is where most youth members are fielded from, this project will focus on the students who attend the Sunday morning worship and study sessions that follow. According to the Youth Minister, this ministry is aware of 10-15 children who they have informally identified as students with some type of learning disability and or demonstrate some type of socio-emotional challenges. Furthermore, these students are heavily populated in from ages five through ten; academically, grades one through five. For this study, we would like to focus on students in grades 3-5.

The Problem

The Youth Minister determined that although the teachers are dedicated to working in this ministry, she disclosed that there are ten to fifteen students whom she feels has "deep and different needs" that the staff is unskilled to handle such delicate situations and students.

The Spiritual Impact

Students with Disabilities of the Worship Experience for Youth at the Abyssinian Baptist Church will be provided with inclusive environments that will embrace their learning needs and emotional supports needed to actively and fully participate in worship services and various activities to strengthen their individual relationship with God.

CHAPTER 2
Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge

"Train up a child in the way he should go:
and when he is old, he will not depart from it."
–Proverbs 22:6, King James Version (KJV).

Throughout chapters 1-3 in the book of Genesis, we learn how God created the heavens and earth and deemed that it was good. Yet, when it came to creating humankind, God chose to create us in his own image. Translated from the Hebrew word *tselem* – image means likenesses or phantom.[2] So, unlike any of the other *creatures* created by God, it was his intension to create humankind in such a unique way that it set us apart from his other creations. Here one might suggest that we were created to be not an exact replica but more than the average "good". Theologian Anthony Hoekema writes, "The concept of man as the image or likeness of God tells us that man–as he was created–was to mirror God and to represent God," in his spirituality and moral integrity.[3] Yet, throughout the Bible, we learn of various characters that are in need of some type of healing from a disease, and or mental or physical disability. How could this be if were made in the image of God?

When we study the word *blindness* in biblical literature we can identify six scriptures that use this word in its text. However, when we exegete the text we must look closely at the social content and context in which the word is being used. In the Old Testament scriptures, we can determine that the word *blindness* is used as a physical affliction or a curse placed on someone by

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[2] Strong's Concordance – 6754. February 25, 2016.

[3] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, pbk. ed. (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1994), 66-67.

God. In this context, *blindness* simply means to physically have less than 1/10 of normal eye vision.[4] Genesis 19:11; Deuteronomy 28:28; 2 Kings 6:18 and Zechariah 12:4, all consist of the same terminology to either "*strike*", "*smite*" or "*afflict*" with "*blindness*" suggesting that this type of *blindness* is of the physical nature. Blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, and paralysis are terms used to describe most of the common forms of physical disability in antiquity. Historically, these terms were intertwined with Bible stories where the main characters were either born with or afflicted with a curse placed on them by God as a result of a sin directly committed by the person or that of their parents (John 9:24). Therefore, when we read the Bible from a high Christology, we may miss the liberating theology that may be intertwined within the text. So if one reads the Bible from a low Christology, one might discover that there are a few important biblical figures that have been described or strongly suggested to having some type of physical, developmental, or cognitive disabilities that were used to fulfill God's promises.

For instance, after wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:3-4), Jacob walked with a limp because the angel "struck him on the hip socket" since he had "striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." This transformative moment *marked* Jacob as the *chosen one*. From there, his name was changed and Jacob was now called Israel and would become the father of the Twelve Tribes of Judah (Genesis 32:22-32). According to the book of Exodus (4:10), Moses stood before God and self-proclaimed, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue". Here the ancient Midrash Commentary suggests, when Moses was a child, the Pharaoh

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4 American Foundation for the Blind, https://www.afb.org (accessed October 9, 2019).

coddled him so much that Moses could be seen taking off the Pharaoh's crown and putting it in his mouth and on his own head. This playful act did not sit right with Pharaoh's magicians and they saw it as disrespectful and a sign that Moses would eventually grow up to take over the thrown. For this, they believed that Moses should be killed. However, Moses's future father-in-law Jethro intercedes and advises that Moses' innocent playful act is indeed no threat to the throne. He suggests that a piece of gold and a piece of hot coal be placed in front of Moses to see if he truly has any understanding of his own behavior. If he does, implies Jethro, then he should be put to death. When the two objects are place in front of Moses, Moses instantly reaches for the goal. Here, I suggest that Moses reaches for the gold because it was a shinny object and may have resembled parts of the crown. Moreover, the Midrash states, the angel Gabriel instantly intervenes and swipes the gold out of the way leaving only the coal for Moses to pick up which he automatically puts into his mouth. Therefore, according to this account, from that moment, Moses speech has "never been eloquent, neither in the *past* nor even now" but God chooses Moses anyway to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.[5] Furthermore, when we read the story of Esau and Jacob, one may suggest the possibility of both Esau and Issac having dealing with some type of cognitive disability. I mean, who trades their birthright for a bowl of soup – A bowl of soup?

The theological perspective on people with disabilities is deeply rooted in three Christian theological themes, which has created social and spiritual barriers for people with disabilities.

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[5] GRAVES, MICHAEL. "Scholar and Advocate: The Stories of Moses in Midrash "Exodus Rabbah"." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 1 (2011): 1-22.

The first is embedded in the connotation that someone with a disability is the result of some kind of sinful punishment. This type of exclusion isolates and often times hinders the identified disabled person from any type of divine leadership role in the faith community. Secondly, the disabled are implicitly seen as those who virtuously endure physical or intellectual suffering to teach and encourage passive acceptance of social barriers for the sake for obedience to God. The third theme suggests, people with disabilities are to be perceived, as charity cases and their inability to do things are to remind the able to exercise and practice a level of humility that is just. [6]

Since theology is the study of God and his relationship to the world, liberation for the oppressed can easily be access through the teachings of Howard Thruman, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Cone and Nancy Eiesland. These theologians suggest we used the theology of liberation to aid the voices of the oppressed that are often excluded from the conversations for justice. Cone states, since God historically sides with the oppressed as he did with the Israelites and sought out their liberation, then blackness must be equated to the oppression of the disinherited and the marginalized. So, I suggest, like blackness, the disabled must also be equated to the oppression of the disinherited and the marginalized since they too experience daily discriminatory acts. Furthermore, Luke 24:36-39 tells us, after Jesus had ascended to Heaven and returned to eat with his disciples, he identified himself has Jesus by showing the holes in is feet, hands, and pierced side. Here, I propose, since Jesus had already ascended to Heaven then he should have been and "made whole". Yet, he appeared before his disciples as a disabled God.

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6 Disability Studies Quarterly, http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/988/1164, (accessed October 9, 2019).

Although some may suggest that he needed to appear as he was to prove his identity. I however believe that in order for God to be the God of the Oppressed, he needed to experience everything that one could possibly experience and to clarify that being disabled is not a divine punishment of sin. As a result, this theological perspective broadens the lens of a liberation theology to include a liberation theology of disability.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions:

1. What kind of systems can churches implement for the development to create inclusive learning environments for meeting the academic and socio-emotional needs of members who demonstrate learning disabilities and or in need of socio-emotional support in order for them to effectively learn, practice, and maintain their relationship of faith with God?

2. What kind of training can churches provide it's teaching team to effectively and efficiently prepare weekly lessons or engaging activities for adults and children who are identified as having a learning disability or present socio-emotional challenges?

3. How do Pastors and or Sunday School Superintendents create and maintain inclusive environments for students who demonstrate learning disabilities and or socio-emotional challenges?

CHAPTER 4
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

GOAL 1: Identify Strengths And Opportunities For Improvement In Current Supports And Resources For Students With Disabilities

- *Strategy 1*: Facilitate a Sunday school self-assessment to identify strategies to develop, improve, and sustain practitioners' ability to implement systems and structures intended to establish a favorable inclusive learning environment for student with disabilities.
    - *The Drivers Best Practices Assessment*[7] *will be used to collect this data.*
- *Strategy 2*: Facilitate a stakeholders meeting to determine stakeholders (teachers, parents, children and administrators). Identify levels of participation and decision making for impact and capacity building.
- *Strategy 3*: Facilitate a structured process to create and design an Implementation Team who will develop an action plan for the collection of data to monitor progress.
    - *Provide the Implementation Team with explicit instructions on how the data will be collected in order to assess what is needed and why it is important for the overall success for the student with disabilities.*
    - *A classroom walk-through tool*[8] *will be utilized to collect this data.*
- *Evaluation for Goal 1:*
    - The Sunday school department will establish practices and policies to appropriately identify their needs to support students with disabilities by

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7 NIRN, https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/ (accessed October 9, 2019).

8 NYSED RSE-TASC Walk-Through Tool, http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ (accessed October 9, 2019).

analyzing, communication, guiding, and responding to data in ways that result in continues improvement for staff to use the selected programs and practices.

GOAL 2: Develop Staff Competency And Practices For Students With Disabilities

- *Strategy 1*: Provide teaching staff with self-assessment survey to determine their level of skills when work with or supporting students with disabilities.
- *Strategy 2*: Provide professional learning session for selected teaching staff members on the fourteen classifications of disabilities, Federal Law, and NYS Regulations 200, 201 and 154.[9]
- *Strategy 3*: Provide professional learning session for selected teaching staff members on finding and using evidence-based practices.
    - *Introduction of explicit instruction*[10]*, effect sizes of strategies*[11]*, ESSA for Evidence, specially designed instruction, progress monitoring, and frameworks for improved results for students with disabilities*[12].
- *Evaluation for Goal 2:*
    - Teachers will participate in professional learning sessions to first understand the barriers, challenges, and learning capacities for identified students with disabilities to implement evidence-based strategies and practices to systematically

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9 NYSED Part 200 & 201, 154 Regulations, http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ (accessed October 9, 2019).

10 Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes, *Explicit Instruction: Effective and Efficient Teaching*, What Works for Special-Needs Learners (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 1.

11 John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1

12 NYSED.

direct, engage, and promote practical and accessible resources for the spiritual growth for all students.

- Teachers will create inclusive classroom settings that incorporate strategic and appropriate behavior expectations for the development of high quality student-centered lesson plans that conform to a consistent format and common expectations for academic and individual spiritual growth for students with disabilities.

GOAL 3: Create a Transformation Zone

- *Strategy 1*: Train and select teaching staff members on how use and implement evidence-based strategies and or practices using research cycles such as plan, do, study, act (PDSA) to strengthen staff competency.
- *Strategy 2*: Teachers will implement specially designed instruction for students with disabilities in lesson plans.
  - *Implementation Team members will monitor lessons using classroom walk-through tools.*
- *Strategy 3*: Implement PDSA cycles using evidence-based practices will be established and implemented for four to six weeks cycles to monitor progress.
- *Evaluation for Goal 3:* Teachers will create inclusive classroom settings that incorporate strategic and appropriate behavior expectations and develop high quality student centered lesson plans that conform to a consistent format and common expectations for academic and individual spiritual growth for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 5
Ministerial Competencies

Competency Goal 1 – Preacher (Speaker): Appropriate Language and Diction

- *Strategy 1:* Focus on the muscles I use for speech while I am talking and monitor my volume and articulation.
- *Strategy 2:* Be mindful of the clarity of my own thoughts before conveying my message or point so that they are precise, articulate, and coherent.
- *Strategy 3:* Slow down words or phrases by implementing a half-second pause between words to produce better speech articulation.
- *Strategy 4:* Continue to listen and engage in conversations with speakers who speak coherently and who have superb articulation.
- *Evaluation for Competency Goal 1:* Create opportunities and or speaking engagements for my site team to evaluate my progress.

Competency Goal 2 – Spiritual Leader: Attend regularly or daily to spiritual discipline appropriate to your own tradition.

- *Strategy 1:* Commit to reading, memorizing and reflecting on specific scriptures by reading the verses through several times thoughtfully, aloud or in a whisper to help me grasp the verse as a whole. Then read it, write it, say the topic, reference, verse, and repeat the scripture again.
- *Strategy 2:* To support my competency for appropriate language and diction, I will need to begin to pray aloud by simply saying my usual prayers aloud, taking note of the content of my prayer and keeping it short for coherency and articulation.

- *Strategy 3:* Establish a pattern to restrict my caloric intake for two days per week (500 calories per day to produce a sustainable and practical spiritual discipline.
- *Evaluation for Competency Goal 2:* By combining the strategies to attend regularly or daily spiritual discipline appropriate to my own tradition, I will create a routine and practice that I suggest will become noticeable and transformative in my spiritual relationship with God and illustrated to those around me.

Competency Goal 3 – Financial Management: Grant Writing

- *Strategy 1:* Attend a grant-writing workshop with a non-profit organization.
- *Strategy 2:* Draft a grant for my research project or non-profit organization.
- *Strategy 3:* Create an elevator speech for the proposal to develop my language articulation, coherency and diction.
- *Evaluation for Competency Goal 3:* Write and submit a grant proposal to an organization that will fund my research project and or non-profit organization.

CHAPTER 6
EVALUATION

APPENDIX A
TIMELINE

DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	Tools Necessary To Complete Task	Person(s) Responsible
10/2019	Proposal Approval by Director	2 copies of proposal	Monika
10/2019	Site visit	Attend Youth Worship Service • Consent Forms • Blueprint of Improved Results for SWD • Drivers Best Practices Assessment	Monika, Itang, Jamila,
10/2019	Stakeholders Meeting		Monika, Itang, Jamila, Pamala
11/2019	Meet with Site Team Members	Secure time & location	Monika
11/2019	Meet with Advisor	Copy of Approved Proposal	Monika

APPENDIX B
BUDGET

Date	Task/ Activity	Tools Necessary To Complete Task	Person Responsible	Budgetary Considerations /Cost	Source Of Funding
10/2019	Proposal Approved by Director				
10/2019	Goal 1	Copies of documents	Monika	$15.00	Monika
11/2019	Meet with Site Team	Location	Monika		In kind contribution by Site Team Member
11/2019	Meet with Advisor	Copy of Approved Proposal	Monika	Gas/Tolls	Monika
11/2019	Goal 2	Copies of documents	Monika	$15.00	Monika
12/2019	Scholarly Research	All of the paperwork and information gathered during implementation of Strategy 1 & 2	Monika	Gas/Tolls	Monika
12/2019	Attend Grant Writing Workshop	Registration	Monika	Registration Fee	Site Team & Monika

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Miller, Debbie. Reading with Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades. Markham, Ontario: Pembroke, 2002.

Ritchhart, Ron, Mark Church, Karin Morrison, and David N. Perkins. Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

Scott, Terrance M. Teaching Behavior: Managing Classrooms through Effective Instruction. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, a SAGE Company, 2017.

Serravallo, Jennifer. The Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2015.

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Simonsen, Brandi, and Diane Myers. Classwide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports: A Guide to Proactive Classroom Management. New York: Guilford Press, 2015.

Smith, Rick. Conscious Classroom Management: Unlocking the Secrets of Great Teaching. San Rafael, CA: Conscious Teaching Publications, 2004.

Wong, Harry K., and Rosemary T. Wong. The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher. MountainView, CA: Harry K. Wong Pubs., 2009.

Ybarra, Silvia E. Explicit Direct Instruction (edi) - the Power of the Well-crafted, Well-tau. Sage Publications, 2008.

Resources pertaining to Instructional Practices/Coaching (22 books)

Andrews, Richard. Research Questions. London: Continuum, 2004.

Bell, Greg. Water the Bamboo: 21 Strategies for Extraordinary Results in Your Profession or Team. Portland, Or., 2009.

Dweck, Carol S. Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential. New York: Ballantine Books, 2008.

Ferrazzi, Keith, and Tahl Raz. And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time. New York: Doubleday &, 2005.

Garmston, Robert J., and Michael Buckley. The Presenter's Fieldbook: A Practical Guide. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 2005.

Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. Switch How to Change Things When Change Is Hard. New York: Broadway Books, 2010.

Heifetz, Ronald A., and Martin Linsky. Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

Hobgood, William Chris., and Ann Updegraff-Spleth. Congregation: Sign of Hope. St. Louis, MO: CBP Press, 1989.

Knight, Jim. Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction ; a Multimedia Kit for Professional Development. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2007.

LeMay, Kathy. The Generosity Plan: Sharing Your Time, Treasure, and Talent to Shape the World. New York: Atria Paperback, 2010.

Lipton, Laura, and Bruce M. Wellman. Got Data? Now What?: Creating and Leading Cultures of Inquiry. Bloomington, Ind: Solution Tree Press, 2012.

Love, Nancy. The Data Coach's Guide to Improving Learning for All Students: Unleashing the Power of Collaborative Inquiry. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008.

McDonald, Joseph P. The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003.

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McIntosh, Kent, and Steve Goodman. Integrated Multi-tiered Systems of Support: Blending RTI and PBIS. New York: Guilford Press, 2016.

Oyler, Celia. Learning to Teach Inclusively: Student Teachers' Classroom Inquiries. London: Routledge, 2017.

Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Al Switzler, and Ron McMillan. Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes Are High. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy. London: Papermac, 1992.

Stone, Douglas, and Sheila Heen. Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well (even When It Is off Base, Unfair, Poorly Delivered, and Frankly, You're Not in the Mood). NY, NY: Penguin Books, 2015.

Student-Centered Coaching: A Guide for K8 Coaches and Principals. SAGE Publications.

Thompson, Dean Keith, D. Cameron Murchison, Jill Duffield, and Martin E. Marty. Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018.

Wiseman, Liz, Lois Allen, and Elise Foster. The Multiplier Effect: Tapping the Genius inside Our Schools. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2013.

Journals

Graves, Michael. "Scholar and Advocate: The Stories of Moses in Midrash "Exodus Rabbah"." *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 1 (2011): 1-22.

Resources I am not sure about (5 books)

"Disabled People in the Church" Some Conclusions from the International Year of Disabled People - 1981.

Berlin, Ira, Marc Favreau, and Steven Miller F. Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk about Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation. New York: New Press, 1998.

LLarson, Kate Clifford. Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero. New York: Ballantine, 2004.

Mayer, Jack. Life in a Jar: The Irena Sendler Project. S.l.: Long Tail Press.

McCarney, Rosemary A., and Rosemary McCarney A. Dear Malala, We Stand with You. Abouraya, Karen Leggett., and L. Wheatley C. Malala Yousafzai: Warrior with Words. Great Neck, NY: StarWalk KidsMedia, 2014.

Appendix B
WTS Acceptance Letter

WESTERN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Jill English
Director of Admissions

December 18, 2019

Ms. Monika Cummings
927 Frost Court
Peekskill, NY 10566

Dear Monika,

Congratulations! Western Theological Seminary Admissions Committee has reviewed your application, and we are pleased to accept you into the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry program, beginning spring semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. We are excited to have you join us at Western.

Admission into the program is limited, and your place is secured with a confirmation deposit. In order to hold your place we ask that you solidify your intention to begin studies here by submitting your confirmation deposit of $250 **upon receipt of this letter** by one of the two methods listed below.

Pay by mail:
Admissions Office
Western Theological Seminary
101 E 13th Street
Holland, MI 49423

Pay by credit card:
Kerry Eshenaur, Accounts Payable
616.392.8555 ext 106

Your deposit will be applied as a credit balance to your tuition account toward your first semester tuition balance. The deposit is not refundable should you decide not to attend WTS. "Next Step" program information will be sent to you upon receipt of your deposit and as it becomes available. Financial Aid information will also be available soon. Please keep our Registrar, Kyle Wigboldy, informed of any address changes so you will receive all mailings.

Sincerely,

Jill M. English, M.A.
Director of Admissions

EQUIPPING LEADERS, CHANGING LIVES
101 East 13th Street, Holland MI 49423-3622
ph 800.392.8554 616.392.8555 fax 616.392.7717 westernsem.edu

Appendix C
Course Proposal

The Hermeneutics of Faith & Disability

Summer Intensive

Instructor Information

Instructor	Email	Office Location & Hours
Monika Cummings-Crusoe	Mecummings927@yahoo.com	6 sessions 6:00-9:30PM 2 sessions 8:00-4:00 PM

General Information

Description

Many people with different abilities have spiritual needs that are not being met and gifts that are not being exercised in the context of congregational worship. This course explores both the complexities of theological perceptions and practices concerning intellectual disability and the ensuing challenges faith and fellowship for persons with intellectual disabilities and those who live in close relationship with them within the contemporary Church.

Expectations and Goals

1. Students will become familiar with the field of disability theology, including reflection on issues such as the nature of God, humanity, suffering, and healing.
2. Students will gain a basic familiarity with the language, history, methodology, principal sources, and primary issues related to the field of disability studies.
3. Students will have the opportunity to engage in ethical reflection on issues of justice, morality, and responsibility in relation to living in a diversely embodied world.
4. Students will be equipped for competent and respectful interaction and service in relation to people with different abilities.

Required Text

- Davis, Lennard J., ed. Disability Studies Reader. New York: Routledge, 1997.

- Eiesland, Nancy, and Don E. Saliers, eds. Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998

- Carter, Erik W. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families and Congregations*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, 2010.

- Eiesland, Nancy L. The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

One of the following two texts:

- Black, Kathy. A healing homiletic: Preaching and disability. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

- Block, Jennie Weiss. Copious hosting: A theology of access for people with disabilities. New York: Continuum, 2002.

Course Expectations

Due Dates: Assignments need to be turned in on the dates specified in the syllabus, unless arrangements have been made with the instructor in advance. Penalties may be assigned for late assignments. Because this is an interactive class, incompletes are strongly discouraged. If a situation arises where you believe you will not be able to complete the course requirements, please see the instructor as soon as possible.

E-mail: Assignments or queries may be e-mailed to the instructor.

Pass/Fail: Students interested in taking the class pass/fail should discuss this with the instructor by.

Academic Integrity: All students are expected to abide by NYTS's statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss options with the instructor during the first day of class.

Course Overview

This course will introduce participants to disability theology as an avenue through which to examine our theological and anthropological assumptions while simultaneously enhancing our abilities to live, work, and interact with others in a diverse world. This course will begin with an introduction to various discourses of disability, including history and methodology. The course will then examine and thoughtfully evaluate a variety of theological structures based on the lens of disability, while simultaneously attending to other differences of embodied and constructed difference. The test of such structures will come in the form of ethical reflection and review, particularly in the contexts of bioethics. A final project will offer students the ability to put such reflection into practice.

Course Assignments

Assignment #1: Student Encounters (15% of grade)

Students will be asked to complete a worksheet, prepare a brief presentation (5-10 minutes) and write a short reflection paper (2 pages) describing one of the following encounters with disability:

• Interview a person with a disability and share their research.

• Read a first-person account of a person with a disability and share their research.

• Watch and reflect on a biographical description of disability in film or media provided in class. Focus on basic information about the type of disability as well as the individual's experience(s) of and attitude(s) towards disability. This paper will also help guide students toward responsible and respectful engagement with this person/issue. **Due Class #3**.

Assignment #2: Theological Evaluation and Construction (25% of grade) Students will be asked to write a paper (4-5 pages) which reflects on a series of questions related to the disability theology text of their choice (Block, Black, or Eiesland) and offers them the opportunity to propose their own constructive project related to diversity and difference (including image of God, nature of human, and model of community). ***Questions distributed Class #3; assignment Due Class #5***.

Assignment #3: Final Course Project (35% of grade) Students will be asked to focus on one of the following three emphases and write a research and application paper on a subtopic of choice (determined in conjunction with the instructor). Findings will be presented in class during the final day of the course. Students will choose between emphases on:

a) Theological evaluation and construction

b) Ethical reflection and application

c) Practical/pastoral considerations

Paper should be 5-7 pages (or comparable investment in an alternative format). Complete guidelines for the project will be presented in class in **Class #5**; assignment **Due Class #8**.

Engagement/Participation (25% of grade) Students will be expected to offer quality participation in course discussions. Students should complete reading assignments prior to class (note: you are allowed to use reading buddies for this class). Additional exercises and assignments will also be assigned to supplement the in-course learning (including films, disability awareness activities, current events readings, and internet based exercises). Engagement/participation grade will reflect both quantity and quality of overall effort in this class.

Course Schedule

Day 1: Course Introduction • Session 1 – Disability definitions, models and methodologies • Session 2 – History of disability studies and disability rights in the United States • **Assignment #1 discussion**	Readings/Activities (Read prior to class) • *The Disabilities Studies Reader (Fourth Edition) Lennard J. Davis:* Chapter 2: Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History by Douglas C. Baynton p17. • Film Short: "Ian" by Mundoloco CGI Ian Foundation and discussion
Day 2: Cognitive effects of disability • Manifestations – Who is Sheldon Cooper? • Needs and situational appropriateness • Caregiver	Readings/Activities • Eisland & Saliers 33-164 • Readings handout from: *God of the oppressed*, by James Cone
Day 3: Intersections of disability and religion (scriptural, historical and contemporary exploration) • Perceptions, belief, and oppressions • Inclusivity in worship • **Assignment #1 due** • **Assignment #2 discussion**	Readings/Activities • Eisland & Saliers 33-164 • Carter • Reading handout from: *God of the oppressed*, by James Cone
Day 4: Introduction to disability theology • Three models: Accessible God, Interdependent God, Disabled God	Readings/Activities • Eisland • Black, Block, or Carter (based on student ministry track)
Day 5: Disability in the first person • Guest speakers – deafness as a different disability • Disability encounters • **Assignment #2 due**	Readings/Activities • No reading assignment

- **Assignment # 3 discussion**

Day 6: Ethical concerns related to medical and minority understandings of disability • Bioethics and disability • Case Studies – Adults, Adolescents, and Children	Readings/Activities • Davis 241-311 • Online reading TBA • Teacher made materials
Day 7: Understanding the Individualized Education Program • What does it mean to have an IEP • What impact does it have on the child, family, and church?	Readings/Activities • Carter • Teacher made materials
Day 8: Theory into practice: self-critically relating to and working in a world of difference • **Assignment #3 due**	Readings/Activities • Students will attend Special Olympics Training Clubs

Appendix D
Thirteen Disability Classifications

Autism – A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a student's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a student's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the student has an emotional disturbance as defined in paragraph (4) of this subdivision. A student who manifests the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism if the criteria in this paragraph are otherwise satisfied.

Traumatic Brain Injury – An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force or by certain medical conditions such as stroke, encephalitis, aneurysm, and anoxia or brain tumors with resulting impairments that adversely affect education performance. The term includes open or closed head injuries from certain medical conditions resulting in mild, moderate or severe impairments in one or more areas, including cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, perceptual and motor abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech. The term does not include injuries that are congenital or caused by birth trauma.

Specific Learning Disability –

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

Emotional Disturbance – A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance: i. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; ii. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; iii. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; iv. A generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or v. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes Schizophrenia. The term does not apply to students who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. Autism Multiple Disabilities Other Health Impairment Learning

Disability Deaf-Blindness Intellectual Disability Hearing Impairment Visual Impairment Emotional Disturbance Deafness Traumatic Brain Injury Speech or Language Impairment Orthopedic Impairment THIRTEEN CLASSIFICATIONS

Intellectual Disability – A disability characterized by significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Deafness – A hearing impairment that is so severe that the student is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Speech/Language Impairment – A communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Multiple Disability – Concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which cause such a severe educational need that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

Hearing Impairment – An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects the child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.

Physical Orthopedic – A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputation, and fractures or burns which cause contractures).

Visual Impairment – An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a student's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Other Health Impairment – Having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the education environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems, including but not limited to a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, diabetes, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or Tourette syndrome, which adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Deaf-blindness – Concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and education needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for students with deafness or students with blindness.

Appendix E
Participant Package

Participant Packet

Letter of Introduction
(Church Leader)

Date: August 22, 2020

May it be well with you today, my sister/brother.

My name is Monika Cummings-Crusoe, and I am studying at New York Theological Seminary to obtain my Doctorate of Ministry degree.

It is my second year on this journey, and I am now required to complete a research project (dissertation). As a certified Special Education Teacher of the Christian faith, I have decided to research the intersectionality of theological education and disability. Over the years, I have come to realize that my faith and work have intersected. As an appointed Christian educator within the church for faith development for Christian youth workshops, I observed youth leaders engaging in lessons, activities, and sermons without considering the needs of members with different abilities. My research project intends to look at how the church provides support for education and formation – spiritual and otherwise – of children and adults with disabilities provided by their ministry leaders?

I am interested in learning about your personal experiences of Christian faith and being a person with a disability or a disabled person. I believe this interview from faith believers like you will help to improve the way in which, church leaders support their disabled members.

The interview will not be like a job interview, but more like a friendly chat about your feelings and experiences. It will probably last for one to one and a half hours so we can agree on a time, day, and place (virtual or in-person) that is most convenient for you.

With this letter, you will find attached a guide to the questions I may ask during the interview. You will also find more information about the project and a copy of an agreement to sign if you decide to participate.

If you have any questions or need any further information, you are welcome to contact me by phone at 914.806.6465 or email at monikacummings@icloud.com. You may also contact my Advisor, Dr. Keith Russell at New York Theological Seminary. You can reach him at krussell@nyts.edu.

Once again, I want to thank you for considering to join me in this research project, but please note, you are not obligated in any way.

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Blessings,

Monika Cummings
Perspective 2021 Doctoral Candidate

About the Project
(Church Leader)

The purpose of my project is to answer the question: "How is disability addressed and experienced in theological institutions to prepare its church leaders in the 21st century?"

I have already started the literature review, which involves researching, reading, and analyzing data that has previously been written about faith and disability. I chose the question above because I felt this would inspire more theological instructions to create programs that would address this marginalized group of faith believers. I believe the results will help educational leaders reimagine the impact and purpose of understanding the experiences of disabled people who are believers in the faith.

I intend to record all interviews allowed to create transcripts. This will allow me to analyze and convey your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions accurately so that I can appropriately align them with my literature reviews. Collectively, this body of work will make its way into my research project for my dissertation. My deadline is to complete my written work is December 2020 because I have to defend my research in February 2021.

I would like to interview people who identify himself or herself as a disabled Christian or a person of Christian faith with a disability. Here, 'identify' means what you would call yourself or what you believe yourself to be.

You do not need to belong to any particular denomination of Christianity or go to a particular church. You do not need to provide any proof of disability, like benefits, to be interviewed. I will ask you what the nature of your impairment is. Impairment is a word used to describe what is different about your body. So, for example, my impairment is visually impaired. I need to ask you about your impairment because this will help put your experiences into context and help me to understand your answers compared to others.

To be interviewed, you will need to have a physical or sensory impairment. You will also need to be over eighteen years of age.

I hope this page has helped explain what this project is about but if you are in need of any more clarity please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience.

About the Interview
(Church Leader)

We will arrange a time, date, and place (virtual or in-person) for the interview that is convenient for you. If you are in need of any assistive technology during the interview, for example, a hearing loop or close caption, please let me know beforehand so I can ensure this is arranged.

As the interview starts, we will agree with your pseudonym. The pseudonym is the name you will be referred to in my project to protect your confidentiality. I will ask if you are male or female, how old you are, and your faith and denomination affiliation. I will then ask you to tell me about your foundation of faith and your impairment. For example, what is it called, how long you have had the impairment, and what effect you feel it has had on your life. I will ask these questions in order to put your experiences into context with others.

I will ask about your physical, emotional, and spiritual ability to engage in church activities and the impact your impairment may have on church life. I will ask about reading the Bible if there are any passages or verses you have found particularly helpful or difficult. I will ask about how you understand God's relationship to your impairment. I will ask about your understanding of Christian healing and what you think about this, and how your faith affects you living as a disabled person.

The interview will not be formal and there are no right or wrong answers. I am only interested in hearing your perspective, understanding, and feelings. Your experiences and thoughts are unique to you and this is what we call hermeneutics–the theology of religious concepts.

I hope the interview will be a positive experience for you. This is not only an opportunity for you to share your understanding and insights but to help others reimagine their theological perspective. Faith and disability can be emotional subjects to explore and since you may not have discussed your feelings or emotions candidly, we may run out of time. If we do, you are welcomed to continue this conversation with me at a later time. Please be sure that you can contact a friend, family member, or faith leader so that they can support you if you need it before or after the interview.

Participant Agreement
(Church Leader)

I agree to undertake an interview with Monika Cummings-Crusoe about Christian faith and disability.

I agree that I have received a 'participant pack', which included a guide to the questions I may be asked during the interview.

I agree that I have been given opportunity to ask questions prior to signing this agreement.

I agree that the content of the interview is to be used towards Monika Cummings-Crusoe's dissertation project about faith and disability. I understand that this may include national and international publication.

I understand that my real name will not be used in any published material.

I understand the interview will be recorded to enable Monika Cummings-Crusoe to transcribe it in written form.

I understand that I can have opportunity to review the written transcript (for a minimum period of seven days).

I understand that the recording of the interview will be destroyed after I have been given opportunity to review the written transcript.

I understand that the transcript will be used 'as is' if my contact details are not correct or I do not respond within the time period given (a minimum of seven days).

I understand that I am able to withdraw from the research project at any stage, including during the interview, if I want to and I do not have to give a reason.

I understand that I will not be able to withdraw after the interview has been completed.

My signature indicates that I have read, understood, and agreed to the above statements.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

☐ I would like Monika to send me the written transcript of the interview so that I can review it.

☐ I would like Monika to send me a copy of the dissertation/summary when it is finished.

☐ I prefer to contacted by post/email

Please use this contact address: _____

4

Guided Questions

(Church Leader)

(An explanation of social model/language, use of pseudonyms, and further contact was previously discussed.)

Name: _____ Sex:_____ Age: _____

I am a faith believer of: _____

Denomination Affiliation: _____

How would you describe the foundation of your faith, the spiritual background of your childhood?

Do you identify yourself as a disabled person or a person with disabilities?

What position do you currently hold in your church?

Can you tell me about your theological education?

- Prompts:
  - Attended and completed seminary
  - Attended and completed certificate programs

When were you called to ministry?

- Prompts:
  - Age
  - Location
  - Faith affiliation
  - Family influence

At what point did you become a church leader?

- *Prompts:*
  - Before entering seminary
  - After entering seminary
  - Family or congregational influence

Do you feel you have been trained to meet and support all of the needs of your members?

- *Prompts:*
  - How?
  - Why not?
  - What should be done?

To what extent did the theological education you received address disability?

- *Prompts:*
  - Unconscious bias
  - Disabling barriers
  - Physical structures
  - Emotional structures

Please describe a situation or event that has helped you reimage your theological perspective with regards to disabilities.

Thank you.

Interview summary to follow.

MONIKA: Did you get any academic instruction before pastoring that church?

CHURCH LEADER: Yeah. I had access to a school out of Plymouth, Florida, called the International Seminary. And there was a corresponding course and an instructor over there that I was able to attend. It was kind of like, what New York Theological Seminary has in their certificate program. He and I took a course and that was pretty much it as far as theological education. And then later on, I went to Sacramento Theological Seminary and Bible College out of Sacramento, California. They became available later on. After I'd started pass through, and I finished that course, there was a Bachelor's course. Okay. And theology. So I finished that course.

MONIKA: Did any of those particular institutions have any courses or any classes that had anything to do with faith and disability?

CHURCH LEADER: No, those are more no systematic theology kind of stuff. doctrinal stuff, the cool stuff, history, you know, courses that were normal to theological training back in the 90s. late, early, late 80s, there was nothing in there to talk about disability. Talked about church gross 10th about starting a church. You know, good good stuff as far as you know. Creation you know, Christology for Terry ology, you know, eschatology, those that are getting to the practical goals of dealing with humankind.

MONIKA: When did you enter seminary full time?

CHURCH LEADER: Monica had discovered, I started looking at education for more of a process of purpose. Hmm What do I need to facilitate what I'm doing? And while theological education was necessary for me, what what allows your education but what I needed, what I really needed was theological certification. So, what I did was I considered Alright, I got education, but what other pieces would help me and this is kind of what you this is kind of what you're talking about this is that while we are, you know, theologically sound, we must also consider What other educational advantages Do we need to better serve people? And so I had some theological education though it may not be certifiable on all levels. I knew it was solid education. So the schools did teach me go. I decided then to go for a Bachelor's in business. So I took a break from theological study, to go do a undergrad in business because I had a heart I discovered I had a heart for ministry in the marketplace. And I wanted to do that by utilizing things like 501 c threes, and partners shipping to church with community or social services. And I knew that that needed to happen not just from a church scenario because they don't give grants to churches, but they give grants to nonprofit businesses. So I wanted to develop a nonprofit business at my church. So I have to research and all of that, considering all of that. I went back to school and finished an undergrad. And so that took me a minute because I had, I had a bunch of credits, but they were all over the place. So I wanted to start to put my, my education together. It's like certifications. So I backtrack. Okay. Part time I finished a Bachelor's from Colorado Technical University. After I finished that, I went to Liberty. I started Liberty I remember live started living in 2011. And it took me seven years to finish the Masters, which was 2018. And that's when I finished the seminar.

MONIKA: So, I have to ask again, in any of those experiences did you come across any courses, any classes, anything that had to do with faith and disabilities?

CHURCH LEADER: I'm trying to remember to remember specifically dealing with faith and disability, but I do remember it's starting to get into things that lead you to those challenges. More

so, you know, it's faith in your family. Didn't really jump into disability didn't deliberately jump in, but it started talking about faith in mental health.

MONIKA: Where was that? Colorado or Liberty?

CHURCH LEADER: So, I'm talking Liberty now. Still not a lot. But what was offered was there was courses that was offered, that you could take that probably would have been more directed to that. Because now you're talking about 2011 through 2018. And after 2011, you're talking about 10 years past 9/11. After that 9/11 scenario, there were a lot of thoughts that were starting to develop, you know, as to mental health. How people have survived traumas and people dealing with that that kind of catastrophe and how to affect the folks. Not only the East Coast but family across the country, if they started seeing other subject matters in, in biblical studies, they started to promote a more holistic, you know, example and so I know they were there but they weren't all in the curriculum for the masters of divinity. The DMin, I mean the MDiv was you know once again taking your biblical studies to another level of understanding about God and then there was just some spot checks the things you know you spot languages you had to do some at least three Hebrew classes three classes you spot check that you spot check did some stuff about holistic ministry but you know you had to pick and when I saw him there was stuff like this is what probably got me closer to was a took a few chaplaincy courses. In my curriculum, they will be an offer. And, then those chaplaincy classes in books you started dealing with some things, you know, as you college campus ministry was in one of those books and so you dealing with that, and I remember them talking about, you know, the mental challenges of the young person that's leaving home and going to a college that was exciting and frightening and something happens and they got to deal with the fact that I'm not home and under the care mom so the whole social dynamic comes in, those kind of things. In there was a couple of classes of once just mentioning about the hospital and the tensions of the hospital and what a chaplain really does and it was I do I remember this clearly, we were comparing chaplaincy and pastor and the pastoring and they were going on down the line of parallels and you know some differences so, once again did just mentioning some things you know, mentioning some things but the course didn't directly you know nail service to the disabled.

MONIKA: So, with all of the training and the experiences you have had, how would you describe yourself as a trained leader?

CHURCH LEADER: I would say, you know, able to handle, oh this is good, able to handle most normal situations, if you understand what I'm trying to say.

Monika: Give me some more on that.

CHURCH LEADER: I've been trained, on how to deal with what, what, what would typically be thought of as a church leadership experience to people who have what we might call normal issues or situations or tragedies. While the abnormal stuff of people's lives, there wasn't a lot of documentation on it. It was foreign. So, if, someone comes and we'll use the word of your study disabilities weren't you know, weren't thoroughly talked about and dealt with in the subject matter. I wasn't taught. I don't think we really taught to handle people with disability we were taught to handle people with abilities. And the charge was trying to get people who had abilities to recognize their abilities to – here's a statement we used to say, don't live beneath their privileges. You know, which meant that stuff, you have you not utilizing it. So we want to motivate them to utilize them and become bigger, better and greater, quote unquote, for God. But in that we didn't consider we didn't consider the friend who had a mental challenge.

We didn't we didn't we didn't have Christian Olympics for the disabled. You know, is it was it was the baseball game for the able body at the church picnic, you know, pick to play basketball, got two working legs and you know, you know, that kind of thing. So, you know, so we were taught to handle that well. So what did we do with you know, those other areas of disabilities, we prayed for them which I believed Monika was a was a way of ignoring them.

MONIKA: So you said that the people, I want to use your words, they weren't included.

CHURCH LEADER: No, not, not, not in the training that I had, you know, not the training I had, you know, almost, almost, like an honorable mention, you know? And, and maybe, like I said, I'm not saying that they weren't other studies available, maybe it means that it needed to be at maybe at that time, it needs to be a specialized study, you know, unless you was was going for ministry to the disabled, it only got an honorable mention. In the textbook, like I said, I'm sure there was books written, textbooks written or some platform that was there, but it hadn't been brought to the fore in the overall thought pattern that this Christian leader needs this, this pastor needs this this master of divinity student needs this to be well rounded. No, wasn't it. Wasn't it like that.

MONIKA: So as I'm hearing you, it was more of an elective, right?

CHURCH LEADER: Yeah

MONIKA: It would be an elective course, basically. Not part of the foundational training that a pastor would receive regularly?

CHURCH LEADER: No, no, if anything I don't even know if it was in the spiritual community. I think it was more in the medical community. I think we treated disability straight from a medical perspective. From a medical context, I don't think we treated it from a spiritual context. In that spiritual context, all we knew was pray. We didn't have we didn't have the training. We didn't have the academia of understanding what the disability meant, how to serve the disability, or how to make it better. We may have had some passion, we may have had love and even care but that you know how far did we take, you know? How far did we take that love, how far did we take that care? And how do we really serve? I mean, outside of you know, having a relationship with the person, which made everything feel a little better. The most the church may have done is put a handicap ramp on the building and felt satisfied with that or an elevator, handicapped parking space in the parking lot.

MONIKA: This sounds like now this is important to you.
CHURCH LEADER: Yeah, because I've been affected personally by the handicap and I understand it more so how, you know, how we've overlooked it. How we haven't given it the attention that it needs. And that's not a negative. That's just where we were as a society. That's where we were in our Christian faith and understand.

MONIKA: So I'm going to jump in and ask you how important do you think it is now for a seminarian, even though they've been pastoring for 10, 20 years or this is their first year pastoring how important do you think a course in faith and disability would be for a church leader now, and not necessarily I've heard you say, not necessarily pastoring your church but a church leader, in any capacity?

CHURCH LEADER: Essential. Without it, that person, or the persons of the future who carry this thing on, will be inept in their ability to minister. We are discovering that we are all disabled in one way of the other. And they could take that theologically and just go spiritual now and just

look at the whole mankind from us from the perspective of being of disability and that's why we needed Christ. Were so disabled, we couldn't save I save ourselves. We missed that, we missed that piece right there. We want to look at in the context of disability. We couldn't even save ourselves that's that's disabled. That's that's, that's just as disable as the person who can't walk because they got legs that don't work from parallelization or amputeeism. We can't do this for ourselves. And so I think, I think that's one of those wonderful chapters of is book or the class or you know, it starts right there. And so once, once that concept is seen, then we can look at the Bible from those lenses and start seeing how God tries to help our unbelief–our disability.

MONIKA: Has the pandemic had an impact on your theological perspective and we in regards to disabilities?

CHURCH LEADER: In the area of trying to connect to people, you have to also ask, who are we leaving out? What happened in the pandemic is that, some of the normalcy of the church became disabled because of lack of technology. And so we had to ask the question, who are we leaving out? Now, we didn't want to leave the seniors of the church out, because it's the seniors of the church who are loyal to the church financially. You know, young folks ain't got there yet. So, immediately, they became disabled, because they know like I said, they lacked the ability of Facebook and internet and all that kind of stuff. So we started asking the questions, who are we leaving out and how do we get to them? How do we get to them? What do we do? How do we keep them involved? How can we connect? So while we were on that, while we were on that question, we had to go further and say, well who else is out there? Who we haven't connected with, or who we can't connect with? And for us it became the hearing impaired. Hit the top of the list because we had a mother who would come to church and her daughter would sit next to her when she would come and kind of sign to her what was going on in the service. When that wasn't feasible, this same mother was going to church at Jehovah's Witness church an hour away because that church offered sign language. And so then we developed an opportunity for this daughter, who we had talked to before just you know, this was a post COVID situation. We talked to her about the being skilled in this so we could offer this ministry. And as timing would have it, she had just come to kind of like graduating her first phase, if you will, of the training. And in that first phase of graduation, through this pandemic opportunity now we're on the internet now we're doing Facebook Live or whatever, live streaming. We gave her the opportunity not to just minister to her mom, but to others through signing the service that we have now on the television, and it happens with a great response. Immediately, there was 10 to 15 hearing impaired people and they have their own community out there, didn't know that, they have their own internet community out there, they contact each other and so it hit quickly that Corinthian had a person signing, the next thing we know they, they are in worship. And the blessing was, they were also able to be in their own faith tradition. Because they were just taking whatever they could get so they could get some kind of word in them. So the pandemic pushed us into that, the pandemic made us more impactful. The first thing that came into fruition on that.

MONIKA: So it's exposing what has not been chosen.

CHURCH LEADER: Oh, yeah.

MONIKA: If any of your church leaders were to attend any seminarian work, would you, if there was a course that had something for them to do? Or they didn't have it? Would you encourage them to seek something in regards to this topic?

CHURCH LEADER: Yes, yes, for a couple of couple of reasons. One, one, because, you know, my own experiences and we've talked about the mental health situation of my family. That's my

personal piece, which ties into the awareness that its technically for ministry. And as you say, it's trying to push people into this. Two, its because it's scripturally popular by the ministry of Jesus, its unpopular in scripture, its just as unpopular in scripture as it is with us today. But it's popular in the ministry of Jesus as you just described. He was notorious for exposing those who have not been chosen. And if they really wanna to be effective for Christ, if you gonna take a call and you really want to be effective Christ, if you're gonna pick up your cross, deny yourself and follow Him, you've got to do this. Regardless of what what we all did in the past, regardless of what was there, we have a lot of stuff that's here now. A lot of things that's being seen now. And definitely This is what is all around us right now. And if you really want to be effective in ministry, if you really want to pastor beyond me, and others, you need to have the disability consciousness because if you don't, you will not be successful. Because what's coming out from us is we're down to right now.

MONIKA: Thank you. You have given me much to write about.

Guided Questions

(Church Member)

(An explanation of social model/language, use of pseudonyms, and further contact was previously discussed.)

Name: _____ Sex:_____ Age: _____

I am a faith believer of: _____

Denomination Affiliation: _____

How would you describe the foundation of your faith, the spiritual background of your childhood?

Do you identify yourself as a disabled person or a person with disabilities?

Can you tell me about your impairments?

- Prompts:
  - Medical diagnosis
  - Medical prognosis
  - Experience of disability/effects on impairment
  - Onset of impairment

If onset during infancy/childhood: How do you think X as influenced who you are?
If onset during adolescence/adulthood: Do you think X has changed you?

- *Prompts:*
  - How?
  - Character
  - Identity
  - Past experiences

Do you feel X has influenced your spiritual life?

- *Prompts:*
  - How?
  - Influence of family
  - Past experiences
  - Becoming a Christian

When did you become a Christian?

- *Prompts:*
  - Can you tell me how that came about?
  - Why then?
  - Did X affect that decision? How?

Are you currently a member of a church?

- *Prompts:*
  - Disabling barriers or discrimination
  - Why that particular congregation
  - How long have you been a member?
  - Have you served in any capacity?
  - Why not?

In the bible, are there any particular passages or verses that have been helpful to you in respect of living with X?

- *Prompts:*
  - Old/New Testament
  - Psalms

What about passages that have been confusing or difficult to understand?

- *Prompts:*
  - Why do you think you have X?
  - Relationship between body and God
  - Experience of prayer

    - Perception of blessing/curse?
    - Purpose of impairment?

What is your understanding of healing?

- *Prompts:*
    - Attending healing service?
    - Experience of prayer for healing
    - Miracles
    - Feelings about healing being apart of the Christian faith?

How does you faith affect your everyday life as a disable person or a person with disabilities?

- *Prompts:*
    - Experience of discrimination/disabling barriers
    - Social interaction
    - Forgiveness
    - God's presence
    - Overcoming difficulties

Is there anything else you would like to tell be before we end the interview?

- *Prompts:*
    - Positive/negative experiences
    - Future aspirations
    - Emotions/feelings

Thank you.
Interview summary to follow.

MONIKA: Do you identify yourself as a disabled person or a person with a disability? And let me clarify what I mean by…

CHURCH MEMBER: Neither, because I believe that your words are powerful, you can't really put those negative things on you than you like, breathing life, you know, power and death are in the power of the tongue. So I don't consider myself as being disabled. Reverend Bachus has this saying, that you know, the not, the not, forgot how he says it, the not yet healed list, or something like that. When I think of a person with a disability, I think a person who's handicap and I don't consider me being handicap. And I don't put those negative annotations on me anyway. So I don't look at myself like that.

MONIKA: What is your understanding of healings? Because you just said that Reverend Bachus is uses as a term not yet healed list?

CHURCH MEMBER: Well, what's my definition of healing? From God?

MONIKA: Well, um, well, cuz you, you, you stated that people who are not yet healed, and for me, correct me if I'm wrong is somebody who is ill, in some type of way, or?

CHURCH MEMBER: Well, to speak of my circumstance, my situation, um, everything in life is a process. And for me, you know, I don't have any limitations. But I have a lot of weakness, some weak, my body is weak, and I need to be strengthened. It takes time. It's like, they zap all your energy out all your strength, and you have to and you can't go hard, because you're gonna hurt yourself. You got to do a slow and steady like, I used to have these bands that because I couldn't do weights. You know, I just got cleared to start doing weights. So, that's a process. So healing is a process. So I believe healing, healing is not magic. It's a process. So I believe that I'm in the healing stage.

MONIKA: Do you know anybody who has a physical disability or a mental disability who attends your church?

CHURCH MEMBER: Mental or physical disability?

MONIKA: So let me give you an example someone who may, so there's a there's a couple of disabilities that are

CHURCH MEMBER: I will spray because this little is not visible. And it would require me to be judgmental. So I don't want to go there and say that I know someone who has a mental problem, because I don't have any. I don't have any medical reports. I can't verify that. I can only be judgmental. So I won't do that. And physical. I mean, I don't know anyone with a permanent physical, or no one comes to mind.

MONIKA: At the church?

CHURCH MEMBER: At the church, no one comes to mind. I'm sure I know probably somebody but if I think but I don't know what comes to mind that would have physical that's visible.

MONIKA: Would you also include that for the ministerial staff as well?

CHURCH MEMBER: I haven't seen them. I don't think they have a physical, I've never seen anyone with a physical disability on the ministerial staff,

MONIKA: And none at the church as well? As far as you're concerned?

CHURCH MEMBER: Oh, I've seen people in wheelchairs. They have. They have sections that wheelchair people come in. Oh, I don't know how consistent they are. I don't know if they are members I don't know anything about that, but I do know that there are wheelchair abled people that do come in.

MONIKA: So you only really see those people on Sundays?

CHURCH MEMBER: Yeah.

MONIKA: And they are usually located where in the church?

CHURCH MEMBER: Where the wheelchair people?

MONIKA: Yeah.

CHURCH MEMBER: They're in the back. Yeah they're in the back. And I think they are in the back because the old church, and I don't think they built it wheelchair accessible when they built the church. So I think that's a new way of providing for them. That's my opinion, I don't know.

MONIKA: So since you've been home in the COVID-19 pandemic, how have you been able to access your faith? So, here's what I'm asking a little deep question. Let me go back for a second. After your surgery and being home, and not being able to get the physical therapy that you will needed, would that have had an impact on you getting to the church physically?

CHURCH MEMBER: Well during the pandemic?

MONIKA: No, no, if there was no pandemic?

CHURCH MEMBER: Oh, that's interesting, because although you have faith, you don't lose faith. You are human so you, you do have some esteem issues that you're dealing with. And that was one of my biggest because I was a pretty good athlete, and never been injured before in my life and to be in a situation where I was walking the way I was walking and I had this neck brace on, um, I don't know if I would have went to church in that condition because, um, not because I wasn't able, well, I will definitely need a ride there so I would have to take a cab there and back because I couldn't walk to far at that point. And, um, I don't know.

MONIKA: Well, let me just ask you a question. How far is the church from here – to your – from your house to the church?

CHURCH MEMBER: The church is on 138th street.

MONIKA: Right? So about how many miles that

CHURCH MEMBER: I don't know?

MONIKA: Your on 106?

CHURCH MEMBER: Yeah, between 106 and 107.

MONIKA: But you said you would need a ride. There would be no way for you to take…

CHURCH MEMBER: At that time, I couldn't took, I couldn't walk down the stairs. At that time, I couldn't walk for long periods of time. So I would have had to have – I think they do have a service like that um Access-a-ride and stuff like that. But I was in such frail condition. Um, the last thing I need people do is to come, ah you know, have pity on me. That's something I couldn't have deal with. So I don't know if I would have it would have worked for me.

MONIKA: Even though you're a member the church?

CHURCH MEMBER: It wasn't – it had nothing to do with the church. It was a personal thing.

MONIKA: Okay.

CHURCH MEMBER: It was me wrestling with my issue. And I needed that alone time to wrestle with my issue.

MONIKA: Could you speak a little bit more about that? You don't have to.

CHURCH MEMBER: I mean, in what regard?

MONIKA: So you said you needed alone time to wrestle with your issue. And was the issue your, your medical condition?

CHURCH MEMBER: Yeah, it was just the state that I was in. You know, I couldn't walk that good. But I had to walk they told you, you have to walk. You know, and then you walk, it appears that all odds are on you. Your weak link in the streets of New York City, which is not always good. And sometimes it just
You just feel more comfortable at home. Because you can shelter yourself from, you know, that image, you can struggle in your apartment, its just you. But to go outside to see others struggling in front of others is very difficult because I was always strong dude you know.

Break in interview

Monika: So would you say that this particular injury? Because that's what it is? That's what you call it

CHURCH MEMBER: Yeah.

MONIKA: Right. This particular injury has it changed or

CHURCH MEMBER: HAS what changed?

MONIKA: Has it changed your, theology about God? When I say theology the way you feel or think about God in terms of did it, did it? Did it? Did it make you stronger in your faith, or did it decrease in your faith? Or has it just stayed the same?

CHURCH MEMBER: I don't think I would define it as increase or decrease. I'll define it as–What it did was, it reinforce my belief. It pretty much, you know, saying that God was with me all along, from him getting me this apartment. So, bringing me through surgery. Now, you know, during a pandemic, which extremely affected me because I couldn't have the therapy for a few months.

MONIKA: What have you been doing in terms of your faith? Sustaining your faith? Because, and let me say this for the record, churches will close they will lock down as well. And we couldn't attend church. We couldn't attend Bible studies. And I know you said you're going to church on Sundays and you were attending the Brotherhood meeting. Right? So not being able to attend those particular services, how did it have an impact on you?

CHURCH MEMBER: Um,

MONIKA: Or did it have an impact on you?

CHURCH MEMBER: I mean you definitely miss the fellowship. You miss it. You miss church, the miss your normalcy. You miss your Sundays. You know, Sunday is the best day of the week you go to church. You know, its something about Sundays for me.

MONIKA: So has it been an issue for you, not being able to physically go to the church?

CHURCH MEMBER: For me, I think it works in my favor. Like I said, when I would go back to church, I want to go back in there, my old way. You know, so for me, I kind of like it, you know, I don't want to go in there and you know, you know, limping or whatever. So, I like it. So this time I'm taking, you know, to get better and stronger. And hopefully by that time, I'll be back to my normal self.

MONIKA: My last question for you is, is there anything you would like to tell me before we end our meeting today?

CHURCH MEMBER: Not really, you gotta ask.

MONIKA: Okay. So what I'm going to say now is that if I at any point I asked you any questions that stirred up anything emotional for you, that you want to further discus that you have my contact information. But I'm also going to encourage you to reach out to someone at the church to talk to them about what you're feeling right now. If it's you know, something that you want to share. Because sometimes these conversations do bring up emotions that people don't even know were there. I just want to say thank you for allowing me to be in that emotional space with you.

Appendix F
Ministerial Competencies

Ministerial Competencies

Theologian	Monika	Ebony	Irvin	Kim	Nzingha
A. Formal training in Biblical Studies	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
B. Continued and consistent study of Scriptures.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
C. Working knowledge of secular disciplines, e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, or economics.	Develop	~~~	Continue	Develop	Continue
D. Study of a variety of theologians to gain a diversity of perspectives.	Continue	~~~	Continue	Develop	Attention
E. Ability to relate the Word to the setting in which people live.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Skip
F. Understanding of the doctrines of the church/synagogue.	Develop	Develop	Continue	Continue	Start
G. Understanding of the historical development of the church/synagogue.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
H. Ability to reflect theologically upon experiences and life styles.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
I. Ability to recognize ethical implications of particular problems and to move to an ethically justifiable posture.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
J. Ability to enable other persons to work through the process of ethical decision making.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
K. A desire to continue to grow theologically and maintain profession vitality.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
Preacher	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Appropriate language and diction.	Continue	Continue	~~~	Continue	Start
B. Effective delivery.	Attention	Attention	~~~	Develop	Start
C. Appropriate sense of length of time.	Attention	Attention	~~~	Develop	Attention
D. Flexibility regarding diverse styles and expectations.	Attention	Attention	~~~	Develop	Attention
E. Ability to organize material effectively.	Continue	Continue	~~~	Develop	Continue
F. Biblically-based, Spirit-directed research.	Continue	Develop	~~~	Develop	Skip
G. Ability to address contemporary concerns and needs effectively.	Develop	Develop	~~~	Continue	Develop
H. Ability to empower one's congregation or constituency to grow spiritually.	Attention	Attention	~~~	~~~	Skip
I. Ability to facilitate growth in discipleship in others.	Develop	Develop	~~~	~~~	Start
Worship Leader	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Well-grounded in the understanding and the meaning of the sacraments or ceremonies of the community and its tradition(s).	Attention	Attention	Continue	~~~	Skip
B. Skilled in helping worshipers move purposefully through the liturgy or worship experience.	Continue	Attention	Attention	~~~	Skip
C. Able to make the liturgy or ceremony come alive for the congregation through her or his own spiritual and emotional involvement.	Attention	Attention	Attention	~~~	Skip
D. Skilled in interpretative reading of the Bible.	Continue	Continue	Develop	~~~	Skip
E. Able to provide opportunities for congregational participation in the liturgy of ceremony.	Continue	Attention	Attention	~~~	Skip
F. Competent in the field of sacred music and other art form, and understands his/her role in the liturgy or ceremony.	Attention	~~~	Develop	Develop	Skip
G. Able to frame workshop within the Christian /Jewish calendar.	Attention	~~~	Continue	~~~	Skip
H. Able to create and lead rituals and forms of worship for specific occasions or situations.	Attention	~~~	Continue	Continue	Skip

Prophetic Agent	Monika	Ebony	Irvin	Kim	Nzingha
A. An acquaintance with issues of injustice, a commitment to changing the world.	Continue	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. Sensitivity to and/or empathy with victims of social injustice.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
C. Skill in analyzing social structures and the ability to diagnose the roots of social problems.	Develop	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue
D. The ability to translate intuitions about needed change into specific strategies.	Develop	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue
E. The ability to discern the ethical implications of strategies for change.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
F. A willingness to embrace risk in order to create social change.	Continue	Develop	Develop	Continue	Continue
G. The ability to involve others in the process of seeking social change, to create group ownership, and to build coalitions.	Continue	Attention	Continue	Continue	Continue
H. An awareness of his or her own cultures biases, and of the global implications of his or her commitments and/or actions.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
Leader	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Willingness to learn from others.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. Creative use of ideas and suggestions.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
C. Consistent ability to follow-through on plans.	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
D. Willingness and ability to take initiative when appropriate.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
E. Ability to delegate responsibility to capable people.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
F. Respect for talents and abilities of others, and ability to facilitate their exercise effectively.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
G. Ability to motivate others to achieve their best efforts.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
H. Ability to provide support and to follow-up on the initiatives of others.	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
I. Willingness to show appreciation for a job well done (including her or his own).	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
J. Willingness and/or ability to share knowledge and resources.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
K. Ability to give constructive criticism effectively.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
Religious Educator	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Understanding of the learning process across the continuum of human life, and a sensitivity to the appropriateness of learning at each stage of Example: development.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. Understanding of the childhood and adolescent learning processes.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
C. Understanding of adult learning process.	Develop	Develop	Continue	Continue	Develop
D. Ability to convert religious concepts and challenges into terms understood by children and adolescents.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
E. Ability to convert religious concepts and challenges into terms understood by adults.	Continue	Develop	Continue	Continue	Start
F. Ability to diagnose needs of individuals, organizations and communities and develop appropriate educational strategies or responses.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
G. Ability to involve, train and supervise other educational leaders.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
H. Ability to prepare, and grasp of subject matter.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
I. Clarity and organization of subject matter.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Skip
J. Ability to employ sound teaching methods informed by knowledge of group dynamics.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop
K. Openness to dialogue with others.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue

Counselor	Monika	Ebony	Irvin	Kim	Nzingha
A. An open, honest, genuine, free person.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. A self-accepting and growing person.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
C. An accessible or approachable person.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
D. Skilled in relating and communicating.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
E. Able to aid in healing or restoring to wholeness.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
F. Able to help others to sustain, to endure, and to work through difficulties or crises.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
G. Able to guide others and to walk along them through their inner journey.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
H. Able to be an agent of reconciliation, to re-establish broken relationships between self and others, and self and God.	Continue	Continue	Develop	Continue	Develop
I. Knowledgeable regarding human psychological development.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Start
J. Able to recognize the limits on his or her own competency as a counselor.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
Pastor	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Caringly administer the sacraments and ceremonies of the community.	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
B. Visits those who are ill, whether in the hospital or at home, including chronic shut-ins.	Attention	~~~	~~~	Continue	Start
C. Spends time with, and comforts those who are bereaved.	~~~	~~~	~~~	Continue	Skip
D. Welcomes, encourage and involves newcomers into the community.	Continue	Continue	~~~	~~~	Develop
E. Cherishes and nurtures long-time members.	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
F. Seeks contact with inactive members.	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
G. Demonstrates self-care.	Continue	Continue	~~~	Continue	Start
Spiritual Leader	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Are families with the spiritual practices and background of his or her own religious community or tradition.	Continue	Develop	Continue	Continue	Develop
B. Sets an example in his or her own observance of spiritual disciplines, including the ability to observe "Sabbath rest," i.e., a regular time of retreat for spiritual refreshment and renewal.	Continue	Continue	Develop	Continue	Attention
C. Are attentive to the spiritual journey of the on-going relationship with God of both one's self and those in one's pastoral care.	~~~	~~~	Continue	~~~	Develop
D. Are an effective spiritual guide to persons in their ongoing relationship to God.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Start
Spiritual Leader (Continued)	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
E. Are effective in leading spiritual retreats, meetings or services.	Develop	Develop	~~~	~~~	Skip
F. Attend regularly or daily to spiritual discipline appropriate to your own tradition.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Start
G. Seek to grow in the knowledge of the spiritual practices of other times and traditions.	Develop	Develop	Continue	~~~	Start
Ecumenist	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Knowledge and appreciation of other faith traditions.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. A willingness and ability to foster a dialogue and understanding across denominational, confessional and religious lines.	Develop	Develop	Attention	~~~	Attention

C. Ability to provide structured opportunities for interdenominational and/or interfaith worship, education, and action.	Develop	Develop	Attention	~~~	Start
D. Ability to inform the congregation of the needs, concerns, and community involvement of other congregations and groups.	Continue	Develop	~~~	~~~	Start
Witness or Evangelist	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Communicate effectively the central message or truth to which the community as a whole has been entrusted to bear witness.	Develop	Develop	Continue	~~~	Skip
B. Are willing to confess your fundamental faith commitments even in the face of hostility, and in ways that are not perceived to be belligerent.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Skip
C. Seek to ensure the future of the faith community and the integrity of its message.	Develop	Develop	Develop	~~~	Start
D. Avoid activities that can be perceived to be "sheep-stealing" or proselytizing.	~~~	~~~	~~~	Continue	Skip
Administrator	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Clarity and succinctness in defining and analyzing a task or problem.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
B. Ability to establish concreate and realistic goals.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
C. Capacity to develop strategies that flow from these goals.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
D. Ability to evaluate achievements in order to decide next steps.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
E. Ability to involve other persons in the process of decision making.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
F. Ability to identify and make use of the personal and material resources in the congregation, organization or community.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Continue
Administrator (Continued)	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
G. Understanding of group processes and dynamics, and the ability to work with them.	Continue	Continue	Develop	Develop	Continue
H. Ability to work to realize the mission of the whole through the various tasks that form its parts.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop	Continue
I. Handling of details with precision and accuracy.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Develop	Continue
J. Efficiency and organization.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
K. Ability to maintain effectiveness lines of communication.	Develop	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
Professional	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Demonstrate skill in written communication, and are able to express yourself will in written work.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Continue
B. Manages time well.	Develop	Continue	Develop	~~~	Develop
C. Limit your workload to what is do-able and are able to say "no" when that is warranted.	Develop	Continue	Attention	~~~	Continue
D. Demonstrate a positive professional attitude towards self and others.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
E. Are dependable in the performance to tasks.	Continue	Continue	Continue	~~~	Continue
F. Are open, honest and personable in relations with people.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
G. Are a good listener and communicator.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
H. Are able to deal constructively with conflict.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue
I. Can discriminate between professional and personal relationships while attending to both.	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue	Continue

Financial Management	Monika	Ebony	Irvin	Kim	Nzingha
A. Budgeting and Forecasting	Attention	Start	Continue	~~~	Develop
B. Stewardship	Attention	Start	Continue	~~~	Skip
C. Grant Writing	Attention	Start	~~~	~~~	Develop
D. Tax Laws	Attention	Start	~~~	~~~	Skip
Technology/ Social Media Management	**Monika**	**Ebony**	**Irvin**	**Kim**	**Nzingha**
A. Launch an Internet campus	Develop	Develop	~~~	~~~	Skip
B. Construct a contemporary worship space	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
C. Design a church logo	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Attention
D. Make a motion loop	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
E. Shoot video on a green screen	Skip	~~~	~~~	~~~	Attention
F. Build a website	Develop	Develop	~~~	~~~	Start
G. Produce a mobile app	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
H. Podcast sermons	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
I. Layout and print dazzling mailers	Develop	~~~	~~~	~~~	Develop
J. Run a digital mixer and light board	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
K. Maximize presentation software	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Skip
L. Craft daily blogs	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Start
M. Tweet	Skip	~~~	~~~	~~~	Continue
N. Collaborate with Artist	~~~	~~~	~~~	~~~	Start

KEY:

Continue – This is a competency in which you excel or rate as highly satisfactory in performance.

Develop – This is a competency which you will need to hone an smooth in order to develop further.

Attention – This points to an area where special attention is needed. It may be that you were never provided an opportunity to develop competency, but it could also be that your characteristic (mood, temperament, commitment, or problem) interferes with your development and execution of the competency.

Start – This designates a competency for which a gift has been uncovered but is not being used, and is an area to develop because the talent is latent.

Skip – This is a competency which you for some reason should leave alone. Be sure to indicate why you should leave it alone.

~~~ – If there is no basis for assessemt, leave the space blank.
~~~

Appendix G
Tables

Table 1. Extent to which disability is reportedly addressed in six curricular areas

	Percentage of responding theological schools					
Curricular area	Not at all	Infre-quently	Occa-sionally	Exten-sively	Area not offered[1]	Missing data[2]
Pastoral care/pastoral theology/ congregational care	0.9%	7.8%	63.5%	27.8%	3	0
Religious education	7.1%	22.4%	60.2%	10.2%	17	3
Spiritual formation	5.7%	29.2%	59.4%	5.7%	9	3
Theology	14.7%	33.0%	48.6%	3.7%	9	0
Biblical studies	22.4%	46.7%	29.0%	1.9%	10	1
Historical studies	27.9%	46.2%	24.0%	1.9%	11	3

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number of schools reporting not offering this curricular area.

[2]Total number of surveys with missing information on this item.

Table 2. Extent to which schools offered activities specifically focused on disabilities in the past three years

	Percentage of responding theological schools					
Has your school . . .	Not at all	Infre-quently	Occa-sionally	Exten-sively	I don't know[1]	Missing data[2]
offered any fieldwork specifically focused on disabilities?	37.7%	18.9%	41.5%	1.9%	10	2
offered any lectures (outside of particular classes) specifically focused on disabilities?	37.8%	28.8%	29.7%	3.6%	5	2
offered any service/outreach specifically focused on disabilities?	45.8%	26.2%	25.2%	2.8%	10	1
offered any internships specifically focused on disabilities?	54.1%	20.2%	24.8%	0.9%	8	1
offered any student groups specifically focused on disabilities?	67.0%	17.4%	11.0%	4.6%	7	2
offered any student publications specifically focused on disabilities?	80.0%	12.7%	7.3%	0.0%	6	2

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number of surveys indicating I don't know.

[2]Total number of surveys with missing information on this item

Table 3. Potential challenges related to addressing disability explicitly within theological education

Percentage of responding theological schools							
Challenge	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M (SD)	Missing data[1]
There just isn't time to address everything in the curriculum.	6.0%	25.0%	20.7%	38.8%	9.5%	3.21 (1.11)	2
We don't have any faculty with interest or expertise in this area.	7.7%	29.1%	17.1%	40.2%	6.0%	3.08 (1.12)	1
We lack the resources to address this issue.	6.0%	25.9%	27.6%	37.1%	3.4%	3.06 (1.01)	2
We don't know how to address disabilities and questions related to people with disabilities within the church.	7.0%	32.2%	33.0%	27.0%	0.9%	2.83 (0.94)	3
Other issues are more important.	8.7%	39.1%	38.3%	13.0%	0.9%	2.58 (0.86)	3
This is an issue new clergy can best learn about "on the job."	12.2%	54.8%	25.2%	7.0%	0.9%	2.30 (0.81)	3
Our students are unlikely to work with people with disabilities after graduation.	46.1%	40.0%	10.4%	2.6%	0.9%	1.72 (0.82)	3

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number surveys with missing information on this item.

Table 4. Interest in accessing resources related to religion and disability

Percentage of responding theological schools						
Resources	Not at all interested	A little interested	Somewhat interested	Highly interested	M (SD)	Missing data[1]
Books	3.4%	15.4%	43.6%	37.6%	3.15 (0.81)	1
Resources for community life (e.g., worship, discussion groups, etc.)	5.1%	16.2%	37.6%	41.0%	3.15 (0.87)	1
Internships/fieldwork ideas	6.9%	17.2%	37.9%	37.9%	3.08 (0.91)	2
Curriculum resources	2.6%	23.1%	39.3%	35.0%	3.07 (0.83)	1
Examples of nondiscrimination policies	12.1%	13.8%	25.0%	49.1%	3.11 (1.05)	2
Guest speaker recommendations	10.5%	28.1%	30.7%	30.7%	2.28 (0.99)	4

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number surveys with missing information on this item.

Table 5. Participation of individuals with disabilities in theological school activities relative to students without disabilities.

Percentage of responding theological schools							
Activities	Much less	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Much more	Not offered[1]	Missing data[2]
Worship leadership	9.3%	18.7%	72.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5	6
Student governance	2.9%	20.6%	74.5%	2.0%	0.0%	10	6
Service opportunities	2.9%	17.1%	78.1%	1.9%	0.0%	5	8
Student organizations	1.0%	16.5%	82.5%	0.0%	0.0%	8	7

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number of surveys indicating that the school does not offer this activity.

[2]Total number of surveys with missing information on this item.

Table 6. Level of accommodations made for students and faculty with disabilities in past three years

Percentage of responding theological schools					
Efforts	None needed	Needed but not yet made	Needed and some have been made	All needed have been made	Missing data[1]
We have redesigned/rebuilt physical structures (other than student housing) to make them more accessible.	19.1%	3.5%	51.3%	26.1%	3
We have redesigned/rebuilt student housing to make it more accessible.	35.3%	10.8%	33.3%	20.6%	16
We have offered flexibility in class/curriculum requirements and practices.	10.6%	0.9%	46.0%	42.5%	5
We have offered flexibility in worship practices.	36.4%	2.7%	36.4%	24.5%	8
We have offered access to services and assistance for those who need it.	9.7%	4.4%	34.5%	51.3%	5

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number surveys with missing information on this item.

Table 7. Extent to which graduates are perceived to be well prepared to integrate people with disabilities into the full life of the congregation

	Percentage of responding theological schools					
Area of preparation	Not at all prepared	A little prepared	Adequately prepared	Highly prepared	M (SD)	Missing data[1]
Integrating individuals with disabilities in the areas of Fellowship	3.4%	54.3%	38.8%	3.4%	2.42 (0.62)	2
Worship and ritual	9.4%	61.5%	27.4%	1.7%	2.21 (0.63)	1
Religious education	7.7%	66.7%	23.9%	1.7%	2.20 (0.59)	1
Service	7.7%	67.5%	23.1%	1.7%	2.19 (0.59)	1
Leadership roles	15.4%	60.7%	22.2%	1.7%	2.10 (0.66)	1
Overall preparation to respond to the spiritual and theological questions resulting from human experiences such as a loved one's disablement, the birth of a child with a disability, or the potential challenges of living with one's own disability.	3.4%	70.7%	24.1%	1.7%	2.24 (0.54)	2

Note: Percentages are based on the number of participants who completed the given item.

[1]Total number surveys with missing information on this item.

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